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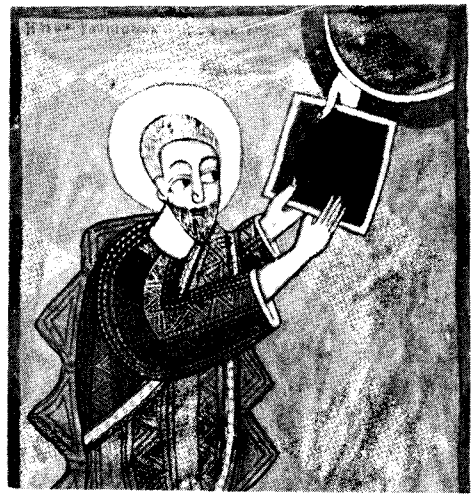

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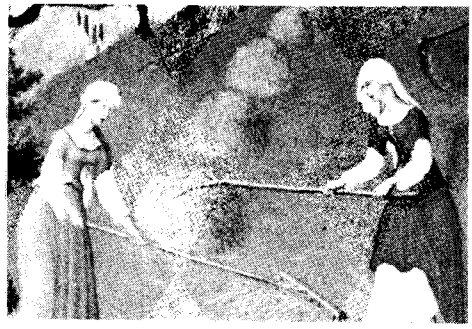

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Smoke Gets in Your Eyes

ARISTIDES

Just now the five most menacing words in the English language may well be: Thank You For Not Smoking. One feels about these five words that a sixth word is missing but strongly implied, and it could be any of the following: chump, creep, pig, scum, leper. The war on smoking, in other words, appears to be going extremely well. Smokers are being nicely segregated in the vast number of restaurants that provide smoking and non-smoking sections. Smokers can no longer indulge in their pleasure during flights of under two hours in the United States, and on some airlines they cannot indulge in it at all. Smoking is being increasingly restricted in public places, and in many offices and factories it is altogether outlawed. A European couple of my acquaintance, smokers both of Gauloises, *sans filtres*, report that in a Colorado hotel they were asked if they wanted a smoking or non-smoking room. "Towards a Smoke-Free New York" runs the title of a *New York Times* editorial, urging state legislators to turn up the screws on tougher restrictions against smoking. No Smoking Except in Designated Areas is a sign one is likely to see more and more in the years ahead, and those designated areas figure to become more and more out of the way. Perhaps one day there will be a sign that reads, No Smoking Except in the Andes.

I am myself a former smoker. As J. Alfred Prufrock measured out his life in coffee spoons, I measured out mine in Kools, filtered and mentholated, generally not many fewer than forty a day. Like Mark Twain, I found quitting smoking easy—I had done it hundreds of times. But the last time I quit was on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean under a cloudless, sublimely blue Greek sky, and that was more than a decade ago. Still, I must confess that every so often a cigarette still looks good to me, though a cigar, which I smoked only infrequently even during my smoking days, can look even better. Temptation is stayed, however, because I have come to believe almost every terrible thing that is said about smoking—that it causes cancer, heart attacks, emphysema, and just about everything else except bad citizenship. And now, of course, to smoke qualifies one for being a bad citizen, too, at least to hear some people tell it.

I quit smoking for the same reasons that many people turn to religion: out of fear and hope. I fear leaving the earth any earlier than need be, for I greatly like it here; and I hope to outlive my enemies, which forces me to stay in excellent physical shape. I cannot say that I felt all that poorly when I smoked, but then, as someone who has been blessed with almost continuous good health his life long, I haven't a clear comparison to go by. As the hypochondriacal Oscar Levant might have put it, after quitting cigarettes I suppose I felt a little less lousy. I coughed less, I ate more heartily, I breathed more easily at the top of the stairs. Where I really felt fine, though, was spiritually. Stopping smoking filled me with what I can only call fatness of soul. I thought myself in control of my own life, no longer hostage to a strong habit, now calm and in command, a beautiful human being—in all, rather a superior mother-grabber. I retained this belief for longer than was seemly. Nowadays, when I see someone obviously as addicted to cigarettes as I was, something of this feeling of superiority returns, at any rate until I remember to despise myself for harboring it.

Yet most smokers I know have a conscience in worse shape than mine. Many among them are smoking scared, and I note that even the most case-hardened smokers among my acquaintances have reverted to the more sissified brands of cigarettes: Merit, True, Carlton.

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When death doesn't worry them, social ostracism does. They light up guiltily, and puff away apologetically. They have come to be thought, and now think themselves, walking engines of pollution. A dear friend of mine used to turn her head so abruptly to the side when exhaling smoke, lest any float under the nostrils of her companions, that I worried she would sooner die of a broken neck than from lung cancer. "Nelly," I once said to her, "why don't you simply slip under the table and finish your cigarette in peace?" One of the saddest questions one can hear these days is, "Do you mind if I smoke?" for it is at once an admission of weakness and a request for what has come to be taken as a grave imposition. I should not be surprised to learn that the question "Do you mind if I smoke?" is today fairly often answered, "Yes, actually, I do mind—very much."

Yet for decades we all lived comfortably enough with smokers and smoking and the smell of smoke. Now, suddenly—presto chango!—smokers have become the most hounded and perhaps detested minority group in America. Because of this, when I do not feel superior to them I feel sorry for them. People complain peevishly about the smell of smoke. They tend to cough around smokers, making plain their protest against smokers ruining not only their own health but the health of everyone around them. Smokers nowadays tend to be treated generally as if they have a distinctly anti-social affliction, like continuous belching, except that, unlike the belchers, they have brought it upon themselves, filthy weaklings. No single bit of etiquette in my lifetime has changed so radically and so rapidly as that regarding smoking.

Except for the odd case of the asthmatic or those specifically allergic to smoke, nonsmokers in the past rarely seemed to complain about smoking, or if it disturbed them they kept it to themselves. Of course, today some of those who are most puritanically unpleasant about smoking are ex-smokers. Beware of converts; they carry stakes and fagots and matches. But the real turning point for the weakening of the social position of smokers has been the increasing evidence that smoking is bad for one's health—downright dangerous, in fact. Where smoking was once a convivial part of social life, it has now become an edgy if not slightly closeted activity. I should not be surprised to learn that many candidates for public office find it politic to conceal their smoking from the voters. Smoking, in the current health-minded atmosphere, may even be thought to show bad character.

"*Midnight Run,*" writes Stanley Kauffmann in the *New Republic,* "has more cigarette smoking in it than any American film I can remember since the era of cigarette-danger consciousness began." Before this time the movies provided some interesting smokers. Humphrey Bogart was an almost perpetual cigarette smoker in the movies in which he appeared, and very much an unfiltered type generally. Edward G. Robinson smoked cigars in his movies as did Sidney Greenstreet. Peter Lorre smoked in the continental style, the cigarette perched perpendicularly upward between his thumb and index finger. Among women, Lizabeth Scott and Marlene Dietrich had rich, raspy cigarette voices, thought by some—myself among them—to be very sexy. Miss Dietrich wielding a cigarette holder could make an adolescent boy quickly forget any baton twirler he might ever have admired. But easily the most impressive female smoker was Bette Davis; she would make the simple act of smoking a cigarette into a high dramatic gesture, like falling off a cliff.

Miss Davis has the female lead in what must be the smokiest movie ever produced, *Now Voyager* (1942). The male lead is Paul Henreid, who is perhaps best remembered for playing Victor Lazslo, the French freedom fighter who is Ingrid Bergman's husband in *Casablanca.* Although I don't know Paul Henreid's nationality, in his movies he seemed to represent gentle European masculine elegance to the highest possible power. The plot of *Now Voyager* is too sentimental to bear recapitulation. The movie deserves to be seen, however, purely for its smoking, which is nothing short of *exquisito. Now Voyager* is the movie in which Henreid regularly places two cigarettes in his mouth, lights both, and deftly hands one to Miss Davis, who inhales from it dramatically. Through the better part of the movie Miss Davis and M. Henreid speak to each other through cumulus clouds of smoke. The movie ends not on a passionate kiss but on a languid smoke, and a fine sexy smoke it is. Miss Davis and M. Henreid smoking in evening clothes over the rail of an ocean liner are, somehow, sexier than any two contemporary actors I can think of who, clean lungs and all, are going at it on screen hammer and tongs in the buff.

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When actors now smoke in movies it is generally to underscore that they are villainous or weaklings or death defying. Smokers in the movies are no longer elegant, in the style of Louis Hayward or George Sanders, who seemed not so much to smoke as to wear their cigarettes. Nor do they avail themselves of such dashing appurtenances as slender silver cigarette cases, of the kind Fred Astaire was wont to slide out from the inner breast pocket of his dinner jackets, or initialed gold cigarette lighters, of the kind that Adolphe Menjou or Noël Coward used blithely to flick under their own cigarettes. So common was smoking in the movies of the thirties, forties, and fifties that, my guess is, an actor, even if he didn't smoke, even if smoking made him ill, probably had to learn to handle a cigarette, the way he might have had to learn to handle a horse, because a great many roles required it. Today such an actor could protest having to smoke in a movie and in a trice have the Surgeon General, the PTA, the environmentalists, and the full forces of (to adopt a phrase used in the Spartacist League journal *Workers Vanguard)* "health fascism" on his side.

Novels of the same vintage tended to be heavily nicotinified. In them, characters were often "inhaling deeply," or "exhaling the smoke slowly," or "flipping away the butt disgustedly." It gave a character something to do at the close of a line of dialogue. Most writers of that day—the twenties through the fifties—seemed themselves to be smokers, at least if one goes by dust-jacket photographs, and a lot of smoke seems to have seeped into their books. "Slowly, without turning his head," writes John O'Hara in *Appointment in Samarra,* "he pulled himself up to a half sitting position and reached out for the package of Lucky Strikes on the table between his bed and Caroline's bed." Later: "He turned. It was Father Creedon. 'Oh, Father. Good evening. Cigarette?' 'No, thank you. Cigar for me.' The priest took a cigar from a worn black leather case." And later still: "There was no newspaper on the table, but he did not want to speak to Mrs. Grady, so he sat there without it, not knowing whether the damn paper had come, with nothing to read, no one to talk to, nothing to do but smoke a cigarette." I didn't make a count, but *Appointment in Samarra* may well be a sixty-cigarette novel.

In those days a cigarette, plainly, was a novelist's friend. When nothing was happening, he could let his characters knock off for a smoke. In the current day, if a character in a novel smokes, it is likely to be merely another of his or her problems. "She takes a drag on her cigarette," a line in a contemporary story reads, "and inspects her varicose veins. . . ." In a novel by a young writer named Michael Chabon entitled *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* rather more marijuana than tobacco is inhaled, but when a cigarette is smoked it is not identified by brand. (In O'Hara, whether a man smokes Lucky Strikes or Camels tells an informed reader a little something about the man.) And sometimes the facts of smoking are got wrong. "I smoked a cigarette in the rain," writes Michael Chabon, "which is the best way to smoke a cigarette." This, in my experience, is not true.

My first cigarette was smoked in the rain; make that my first five or six cigarettes. The brand was Herbert Tareyton, cork-tipped but unfiltered, rather loosely packed, so that filaments of tobacco stuck to one's tongue. I and my friend Norm Brodsky, who was puffing away along with me, were twelve. Tareytons were Norman's father's brand of cigarettes; my father smoked cigars, though on the rare occasion when he bought a pack of cigarettes it was usually Tareytons, too. We bought the cigarettes at Simon's Drugstore one rainy school-day afternoon. Lighting them in the rain wasn't easy, and smoking them, when raindrops first blotched, then dampened the paper was no cinch either. My recollection is that we each smoked five or six cigarettes, and then, lest it provide incriminating evidence, tossed the rest of the pack in the bushes. We can scarcely be said to have enjoyed the cigarettes we did smoke, though neither of us became the least bit sick, as young boys, toward the end of being taught a lesson, are supposed to become the first time they smoke. Norman and I both went on, as it turned out, to distinguished smoking careers.

I cannot recall the exact moment when I decided to become a regular smoker. Doubtless it was linked to the realization that I was not destined to win glory as a high school athlete. The seal was set on this realization late one afternoon deep in the autumn of my fifteenth year. A fairly lowly sub on our school's frosh-soph basketball team, I was seated at my accustomed place toward the end of the bench next to a boy named Les Handler in the drafty gym of Kelvyn Park High School

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on the west side of Chicago. Les and I only rarely got into games, a situation to which I had become sadly resigned but to which Les could not quite reconcile himself. Sitting there on the bench, he had become a gonfalonier of grievance, of a not highly witty order I am bound to report, and as each game progressed he provided me with a running commentary in which he didn't mind remarking that many of the boys who played ahead of us on our own team were really quite (I euphemize) excrementitious.

Les was going on in this vein at Kelvyn Park that dark autumn afternoon when, with four and a half minutes left to play and our team well ahead, Coach Eugene Fricker called out, "Aristides, Handler." We left our places on the end of the bench to take up a position of readiness, on one knee, awaiting a time-out or a foul so that we could go into the game. Four and a half minutes, for us, was a substantial block of time—substantial and potentially delightful; it stretched out before us luxuriously, like the promise of a weekend with, say, Rita Hayworth. Except that no time-out was called nor any foul committed, and as the buzzer sounded for the end of the game, Les Handler and I were still in empty readiness on one knee alongside Coach Fricker.

Dressing in the dank Kelvyn Park locker room, neither of us spoke. I, sunk in despondency, had nothing to say. Les had already used up all his profanity in his game-time commentary; besides, the English language was deficient in that it failed to provide words adequate to his anger. Now dressed, we went off together, not wishing to ride home with the other team members. All that was left to us by way of giving vent to our extreme frustration was to break training. Not that anyone cared if we did, you understand, but it seemed the least we could do. We were too youthful to buy liquor; drugs had not yet come on the scene. Instead, wearing leather jackets and carrying our gym bags, we walked into a corner mom-and-pop grocery store and emerged with two Pepsi-Colas, a box of Dolly Madison chocolate-covered donuts, and a pack of Lucky Strikes. It would not be the last time that a cigarette would present itself as a consolation.

Ours was a high school in which, I would guess, roughly half the kids smoked, with boys, I would guess again, more active in this line than girls. Smoking was an emblem of adulthood, the most readily and cheapest available (cigarettes were then 25 cents a pack), and the ideal had not yet become to remain youthful into old age but to act as grown-up as possible when one was young. Many of my classmates—not all of whom would go on to college—appeared to have attained a quite astonishing simulacrum of maturity: they dressed, looked, and took themselves for adults. So it seemed the most natural thing in the world, when they briefly interrupted a heavy conversation about cars, pro football, or the mysteries of sex, to slide a pack of Chesterfields or Old Golds out of their shirt pocket, tamp down a butt, light it with a Zippo or Ronson, and release a thin but authoritative stream of smoke.

Many though by no means all my closest friends smoked. I cannot make out a clear pattern among those who did and those who didn't. Odd, is it not, the way some people are never in the least tempted by those habits that keep life jumpy if not always jumping for others of us: smoking, drinking, gambling, promiscuity. In the case of "the tenacious weed," as I have recently seen tobacco described, some people were instantly repulsed by it; some others failed to see the point of it; and a fortunate few could take it or leave it. I took to it straightaway, and by the age of sixteen was a full-time and altogether serious smoker. By a serious smoker I mean someone who begins and closes and otherwise punctuates his day with cigarettes.

Although my parents knew I smoked, I did not, in high school, like to smoke my first cigarette of the day at home, lest they think their charming boy already addicted to cigarettes, which of course I was. I waited instead until I was picked up for school by Ronald Harris in his 1949 blue four-door Plymouth. I was one of five passengers in that Plymouth, along with Ronnie Harris who made six, all of us smokers. On wintry mornings, the Plymouth's windows shut against the cold, however sunny it may have been outside, inside that car it was like London on a particularly foggy night. Hams and loxes, I suspect, have been smoked in cleaner air. I remember once, just after the Plymouth had been parked and we departed from it, looking back to note smoke curling out of it as if it had earlier been on fire. That I survived more than a year of morning rides in Ronnie Harris's mobile smokehouse leads me to doubt the claims of

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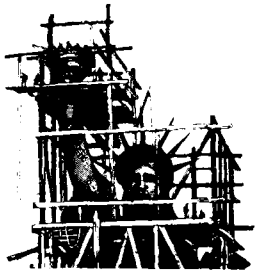

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the anti-smoking campaigners about the dangers of what they call "second-hand smoke." Were these claims true, I should be writing this essay in a room in a Swiss sanatorium.

Emerging from Ronnie Harris's Plymouth, we all strode into a cavern with a long marble-topped bar known as Harry's School Store. It was at Harry's that I ate my first bacon-lettuce-tomato sandwich, which, along with baseball and the light bulb, I number among the three greatest American inventions. Along with excellent BLTs, Harry's, at all hours, provided a heavy haze of smoke, which I added to before class, at lunch, and then again after school. I could apparently still go three- or four-hour stretches without requiring a cigarette, for, though I cut more than my share of classes, I cannot recall ever doing so because I was desperately in need of a cigarette. Instead I smoked when I could, in a jolly and by my lights sporty way, drawing smoke deep down, belching it out in perfect smoke rings, French inhaling, learning to light a matchbook match with one hand, exhaling smoke through my nose, like an angry bull in a comic book.

Although it was not the chief reason I went to school there, the University of Chicago permitted smoking in classrooms, which I thought a fine thing. Students and professors both smoked away—so much so that, in the context of the seriousness of the university, smoking almost came to seem an intellectual gesture. (French intellectuals were evidently also heavy smokers; Camus and Malraux, both of whom I then took for culture heroes, seem invariably to be photographed with cigarettes pendant from their lips.) Some of my instructors at the university were nervous smokers; several unattractively so, with nicotine-stained fingers and ashes dribbling down their rumpled lapels; a few, though, could make smoking seem an elegant tic and were able to use their cigarettes to underscore points the way other people used italics. Cigarette smoke itself came to seem part of the atmosphere of intellectual discourse.

My own smoking must have increased in intensity during these years. I chose not to study in beautiful old William Rainey Harper Library because I couldn't smoke there, and smoking concentrated my intellectual powers, or so I told myself. Hyde Park, the neighborhood in which the University of Chicago is located, is an enclave, then as now locked between two tough slum neighborhoods, but I found that, if I ran out of cigarettes after, say, nine or ten at night, I was still ready, after much hesitation and more trepidation, to run (I use the word here in its literal meaning) out for more. I was not yet ready to kill for a smoke but evidently quite prepared to be mugged for one.

An army is said to march on its stomach, but when it isn't marching, it is, at least in my peacetime experience of the military, smoking on its duff. The army hour, like the psychotherapeutic hour and the academic hour, is composed of fifty minutes, with the last ten minutes given over to smoking a cigarette. Cigarettes were cheap—fifteen cents a pack at the PX—and therefore plentiful. Every barracks, orderly room, latrine was decorated with red cans (known as butt cans) filled with sand for cigarette ashes and stubs. No reading matter was permitted the first eight weeks in the army, not even a newspaper, but the men who designed the extremely effective exercise in the breakdown in civilian personality known as basic training were not so crazy as to try to stop young troopers from smoking. "O.K. men, the smoking lamp is lit," one or another sergeant was regularly barking out during basic training. "Light 'em if you got 'em." I had 'em, I lit 'em, I smoked 'em.

Of the time I spent in the army, I should have to say that I liked the time spent smoking best, which was roughly a sixth. As a serious smoker, I tried in civilian life to keep to a military budget of one cigarette for every waking hour. This, though, proved difficult to keep, for so many of life's activities seemed to call for accompaniment by a cigarette. Coffee without a cigarette seemed unnatural; booze without a cigarette, impossible. A meal required capping off with a smoke, a fine meal with two or three. Emerging from the subway or completing any little trip or errand called for a nicotine reward. Picking up a cigarette while on the telephone came especially easy. In a minor crisis—a deadline looming up, an argument, tension of one kind or another—all cigarette budgetary bets were off, and I smoked whenever the nicotine twitch beckoned. I began to do things like drink more coffee to heighten the pleasure of smoking. ("It was never the sex, my dear, it was the cigarettes afterwards," would make a good crack in a comic novel of the kind no one writes anymore.) King-size cigarettes had long since been on the market, but the genius had

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not yet arisen to invent what many a serious smoker among us really required: the all-day cigarette.

During this period, I became greatly enamored of the accoutrements of smoking. Had I been a cigar smoker, I should no doubt have carried around a little gold cutter and kept a humidor box on my desk. Had I been a pipe smoker, the possibilities would have been endless; from pouches to racks to tampers to humidor jars to special lighters to little holsters—one could almost build a life around smoking a pipe. For a cigarette smoker the possibilities were much narrower. A cigarette holder seemed to work well for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, but if one weren't actually president of the United States it seemed, for a man, a mite pretentious. Cigarette cases, very slender ones, monogrammed, of gold for women and of silver for men, best received as a gift from someone of the opposite sex, always struck me as a handsome touch. Offering a cigarette to a companion from one's cigarette case, then taking one out for oneself, tamping it down a time or two atop the closed case—here was a gesture fit for white tie, tails, and Fred Astaire. (Whether Fred Astaire really smoked I do not know, but in movies he handled a cigarette wonderfully well; no one was better at flipping a cigarette away.) By the time I could afford a silver cigarette case, cigarettes of differing lengths were being produced—one cigarette, it will be recalled, claimed to be "a silly millimeter longer"—which made it difficult to purchase a case, for one didn't know what length cigarette one might next be smoking. Somehow the cigarette case had already seemed a part of a permanently bygone era, an accessory fit only for drawing-room comedies, Somerset Maugham stories set in the Malay states, and smart New York supper clubs.

Which left cigarette lighters. At one time or another, I must have owned nearly every kind made. I have owned cigarette lighters that, in retrospect, have given more pleasure than the cigarettes they lit. I once owned a gold-filled Dunhill—purchased for forty-five dollars in 1965, a great extravagance—that increased my smoking by the simple delight that feeling its heft in my hand and lighting it gave; I was always playing with it, and as long as I had it out, I would, before putting it back in my pocket, use it to light a cigarette. As a wayward youth on a visit to New Orleans, I once watched the performance of a redheaded striptease artist named Reddi Flame, and of course it is precisely a ready flame that an efficient cigarette lighter confers. To reach over to light a woman's cigarette with an elegant lighter seemed a grand thing—still does. In *Lifemanship*, Stephen Potter mentions a man he names William Staines, who won the devotion of women sheerly through the perfection with which he wielded a cigarette lighter:

> He had a rack of a dozen lighters, which he cleaned and put in order once a week. Before making for his girl, he would select one, fuel it, put in a new flint, taking care to choose a large and manly one for the tiny, frightened girl, or one, for instance, with cigarette case and pencil attached for the slightly oopsy girl. At precisely the right moment in the cigarette manoeuvre, fire would dart from his hand. He had trained himself to see a pretty girl feel for a cigarette across three platforms of Waterloo Station, as it were, and to be behind her, flame ready, before the cigarette was at her lips.

Potter claims that Staines's real genius was that "by concentrating on *one part*, he was able to suggest *the whole*." Staines was so gentlemanly with his lighter that most women went on to believe that everything he did must be an expression of beautiful manners—"even," Potter writes, "if she found herself left with the two heaviest bags to carry, and was asked to stand over them while Staines himself went into the refreshment room for a cup of tea."

I should not like to go on the road now selling cigarette lighters, especially table lighters, which used to adorn the coffee table in most middle-class homes but which have now all been removed. Owning a tobacco shop also strikes me as a difficult way to become wealthy, though I can remember when tobacco shops were almost as common as gas stations. The ultimate tobacco shop was Dunhill's; today, alas, it is more and more given over to selling clothes and costly kitsch. I used to go into a Dunhill's near an office I once worked in, usually to buy a pack of their cigarettes or a cigar. The chief clerk in the tobacco section was a lower-middle-class Englishman who was immensely knowledgeable and not in the least snobbish. He was able to discuss the arcana of pipe tobacco mixtures in a manner that excited the interest

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of connoisseurs; he could tell you about the exact quality of the most recent shipment of cigars, which had such promising names as Dunhill Monte Cristo Colorado Maduro No. 1. In the humidor room, where boxes of cigars were kept in vast quantities, powerful men rented small lockers in which they stored their own expensive cigars (including occasional importations from Cuba that came by way of Canada) under ideal conditions. The names on these lockers—those of the mayor, a gossip columnist, judges, wealthy merchants, the conductor of the symphony orchestra, a cardinal—represented a healthy chunk of what once used to be called "the power structure." Cigars and power seemed to go together.

Cigar smokers were a different breed from cigarette smokers; they appeared more substantial, less nervous. While cigarettes seemed a habit, cigars seemed part of a man's character. One thinks of Winston Churchill, characteristically, with a tumbler of Scotch whiskey in one hand, a good-sized cigar in the other. A photograph of H. L. Mencken on the wall above my desk shows him in a silk striped shirt, typing away, a cigar jammed into the corner of his mouth—and the cigar looks right. Groucho Marx used his cigar the way Charlie Chaplin used his cane: as a baton with which to conduct his madcap comedy. Although political cartoonists are fond of using the cigar as a symbol of the big-time capitalist, Bertolt Brecht, both an anti-capitalist and an anti-American, adored Virginia cigars. A cigar suggests prosperity, and, sometimes, corruption. The smoke in the infamous smoke-filled rooms in which political deals were made was, presumably, cigar smoke. Fight managers smoked cigars (usually chewing on the stubs); so, too, did gangsters who arrived at the upper echelons of their trade. Carmine Galante, an alleged Mafia guy, was killed in Brooklyn with a cigar actually in his mouth.

But the gentlemanly tradition in cigar smoking is richer than that of the thug and plug-ugly tradition. This tradition, largely though not wholly English, is one in which cigars were smoked in clubs and at table with port after the ladies had left the room. In this tradition a cigar becomes a gentleman's accessory, an appurtenance, like a walking stick or a fine pocket watch. Unlike these items, a cigar gave delight beyond that of mere possession. Arthur Rubinstein, who lived to the age of ninety-four, was turned on to cigars at thirty and claimed they gave him "untiring pleasure." Untiring pleasure is what Ernest Newman (1868–1959), the splendid music critic of the *Times* (of London), appears to be taking from the cigar he is smoking on the cover of the first volume of his *Essays from the World of Music*. A bald man in thick spectacles, sitting in a deep, heavily stuffed armchair, wearing a loose-fitting lounge suit, listening, one gathers, to music being played upon a phonograph, Newman holds a cigar, smoked about halfway down, in his right hand, a cigar that seems almost animate, rather like a pet, an object in any case most companionable. This, you feel looking at the photograph, is cigar smoking at a high level.

There is something not merely masculine about cigars, but something that seems positively to exclude women. Cigarettes are androgynous, and can be shared between men and women. They have often been construed as an accessory to romance: "Here we are," runs a line from a lost love song from my youth, "out of cigarettes / see how late it gets . . . ," and so forth. None of this is true about cigars. Cigars are emblems of male celebration, used to mark the closing of a deal or the birth of a child. Lighting up a Macanudo, a Royal Jamaica, a Thompson Tampa, one feels a bit of a man of the world; and two men lighting up cigars together often feel a wholly masculine sense of intimacy. Unless they happen to be George Sand, women do not smoke cigars; most women, in fact, detest and protest against them, claiming it is their stench they abhor. The number of women who have made romance with a man conditional on his giving up cigars cannot be known. Kipling, in a poem of twenty-five rhyming couplets entitled "The Betrothed," wrote about a man whose fiancée asks him to choose between her and his cigar smoking. The poem's famous penultimate couplet runs:

> A million surplus Maggies are willing to bear the yoke;
> And a woman is only a woman, but a good Cigar is a Smoke.

My father smoked cigars, not very costly ones, at the rate of six or seven a day. Cigar smoke was one of the smells, a half-way-smoked cigar in an ashtray one of the sights, of

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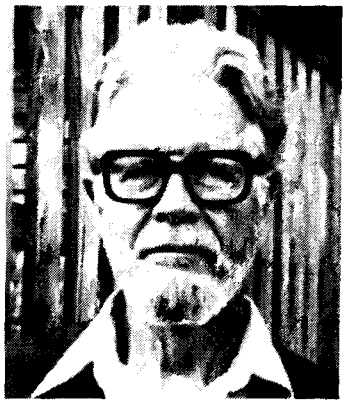

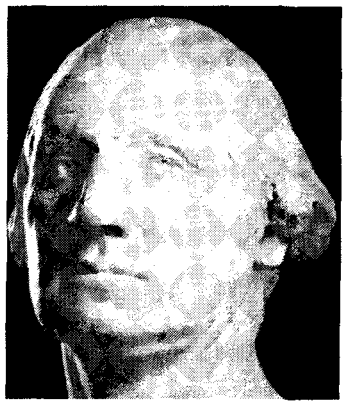

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my youth. I used to smoke an occasional cigar, but their chief effect upon me was to quicken my hunger for cigarettes. Pipes, which I also tried, were worse. I always liked the smell of burning pipe tobacco, unless I was the man burning it, in which case I scarcely smelled it, but had to concentrate my full attention on keeping the pipe from going out, my tongue from swelling, my clothes from being set aflame by errant ash, and my face from looking hopelessly smug and perhaps eminently punchable. Pipes were permanently out, but roughly a year ago I smoked a cigar, a cheapy Antonio y Cleopatra Grenadier (light wrapper), which I nursed through a nine-inning baseball game and which I enjoyed immensely, though I worried a bit about whether it would help put me back on the road to that dread Irish seducer, Nick O'Teen. My father, on the other hand, after smoking for more than half a century, one day in his seventy-fifth year stopped cold, without fuss or bother, and never looked back.

"Life is a sum of habits disturbed by a few thoughts," wrote Valéry, and of these few thoughts perhaps none is more disturbing than that having to do with giving up one of those habits. I don't remember exactly when it first occurred to me to stop smoking—I may have had a bad cold, or a case of flu—but, even though I did not succeed in quitting, life was never quite the same afterward. I now inhaled smoke and exhaled guilt. I could no longer enjoy smoking nor, since I found it very difficult to quit, could I enjoy not smoking.

Few things can more quickly reduce one's generous estimate of one's own character than attempting to quit smoking cigarettes. To know oneself thoroughly hostage to those little white tubes of tobacco damages one's sense of self-grandeur, not to speak of putting a frightful crimp into one's utopian politics. (In *Darkness at Noon*, Arthur Koestler is very good at showing how important cigarettes are to Rubashov, his defeated revolutionary hero.) During lost bouts with quitting smoking, I was not above going up to friendly looking strangers who were smoking to ask, in a parody of Bogart in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, "Excuse me, but do you happen to have a cigarette for an ex-serviceman?" Late in the afternoon of a day on which I had not smoked, my mind might vaguely drift off to imagining a personal tragedy of a kind that would permit me to return to cigarettes: "Oh, yes, his entire family has been wiped out in a flood. It's no wonder he's returned to cigarettes, poor man." Even now, a decade after no longer smoking regularly, I appear in one of my own dreams with a cigarette in my hand, disappointed with myself for having gone back to smoking.

When I failed at quitting smoking, I thought it certain proof of my weakness of character. Now that I have quit smoking, am I entitled to think myself a man of strong character? Life offers its tests of character, but I strenuously doubt that quitting cigarettes is among them. Besides, I didn't quit smoking to improve my character, or to help clean up the environment, or to close in on physical perfection. I quit smoking because I was afraid of dying, or at least of dying any sooner than is absolutely necessary. I have no wish to give up my room in this comfortable and amusing resort even a minute before actual checkout time. Apart from being more than a bit unclear about what awaits elsewhere, I happen to like it here, hugely.

What I think quitting smoking may be about is the comedy of human resolution. The Virgil of this subject is the Triestine novelist Ettore Schmitz (1861–1928), who wrote fiction under the name of Italo Svevo. The first chapter of Svevo's novel *Confessions of Zeno* is entitled "The Last Cigarette." In it Zeno Cosini, a Trieste businessman, undergoes medical and electrical treatments and finally psychoanalysis in the effort to give up cigarettes. All are abortive, despite his endless resolutions to quit smoking. No cigarette, after all, tastes quite so good as the last cigarette. What better, then, than to make every cigarette one's last? Or, when one has resisted smoking for several hours, the clean feeling in one's mouth, as every smoker and former smoker will verify, only makes one long all the more for another cigarette. "Directly I had smoked it," Zeno notes, "I felt remorse and again began making the very resolution I had tried to repress." With the making of fresh resolutions, the remorse felt at breaking them, and the remaking of renewed resolutions, the days pass agreeably enough for Zeno. So seem they to have done in Svevo's own life, for he was fairly clearly writing out of personal experience in *Confessions of Zeno*. Most photographs of Svevo show him cigarette in hand, and P. N. Furbank, one of his biographers,

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tells that, on his deathbed, Svevo, seeing his physician-nephew light up a smoke, asked for a this time truly last cigarette. Sad to have to report, he was denied it.

Do they, I sometimes wonder, order these things better in Europe? When I was last there, no maître d' asked me if I wished to sit in the smoking or non-smoking section of his restaurant. People in the streets of Florence and Ravenna smoked away, near as I could make out, quite guiltlessly. A friend, a physician who is not himself a smoker, reports that on a TWA flight to Stockholm he and his fellow passengers were treated to a quite menacing lecturette about not smoking on the plane, except in designated areas, and especially about not smoking in the lavatories, where there were smoke detectors—and fooling with them, everyone aboard should know, was a federal crime. "Returning on SAS we found the Scandinavians much more humane," he writes. "They didn't mention any of this." On a recent flight I took from San Francisco to Chicago, the chief stewardess announced that, owing to the crowdedness of the flight, there would be no smoking section at all on the plane, and hence no smoking, except in the first two rows of first class. A large number of people applauded, as if to say, "Good, let those smoking dogs suffer." When the writer Raymond Carver recently died, at the age of fifty, of lung cancer, the *New York Times*, in its obituary, saw fit to note that Carver was "a heavy cigarette smoker until he became ill," thus using the occasion of a man's death to deliver a little health sermon.

The time has long passed when Americans have looked to Europe as the font of all wisdom on living the good life; if anything, the traffic here appears to be running the other way, especially among the young in Europe, who glom on to almost all things American with real excitement. But Europeans have been sensible in thus far taking a pass on the new American health fascism, in which everything is subservient—not to the state, as under political fascism—but to the ideal of extending sheer biological life. I am myself someone who is not only immensely greedy for life but who, if the truth be known, lives pretty much according to most of the tenets of health fascism: pledged to the shining if utterly unheroic goals of clean lungs, clear arteries, tidy intestines, and a glowing carcass generally.

Although I appear to live with equanimity under this regime of health fascism, within me, still very much underground, a timid resistance fighter lurks. This is the fellow who, when he learns that a middle-aged man has bitten the dust while jogging, smiles inwardly and knowingly at the futility of efforts at human perfection; who is secretly pleased to learn that an obviously alcoholic woman has died, peacefully in her sleep, at the age of ninety-six; who is always delighted to learn about any man or woman who beats the health odds by simply ignoring them. This same fellow is always advising me, when confronted by a temptation that might be hazardous to my health, to let 'er rip. Sometimes I listen to him; more often I do not. On smoking we have reached a compromise, which is that, if I make it to eighty, I shall begin smoking again. It's fewer than thirty years away. If you are around then, too, try not to act surprised if I ask for a light.

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My Uncle's Canary

JANE MAYHALL

My uncle had a canary that merrily
tripled triads in the blue mornings

of Kentucky, in the town of Lexington.
And the grass was always blue, lime-sweet

in the roaming fields where the horses stood
elite, chomping near to white rail fences.

And the canary in its wizard habitation
sprinkled my uncle's rich and roomy kitchen

as with gold ducats, glittering immortality
that, like dizzying tinklets of chandeliers

in the baronial dining room, I knew would
never change. I, five years old, peeping

through lace curtains, saw what high-born
neat agenda he had planted around; willows,

bonbon posies. And the canary like a tiny
yellow paintbrush in its cage underwrote

the glowing picture, youth and security.
The horses neighed at night when my uncle

took us, myself and family, dancing at a
roadhouse down the pike. The Crash that

never came, the police who locked him up,
the banknotes filled with empty signatures

did not emerge at all. The dissolution of
his frivolous joy at that time never came.

And still, crisp as dollars, the grass more
blue than green, and sky in its windowed arch

caught the savvy song of my uncle's canary,
because he was so rich. And we were young.

✪ JANE MAYHALL is the author of *Cousin to Human, Ready for the Ha Ha and Other Satires*, and two books of poetry.

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The Map of the Middle East
A Guide for the Perplexed

BERNARD LEWIS

AT FIRST SIGHT, the political map of the Middle East or, as it used to be called, the Near East, looks very much like that of any other region. It consists of lines drawn across the map, enclosing territories which are called countries or—following the modern usage which gives a new meaning to an old word—nations, each of which has its own distinctive name and is the seat of a separate government ruling an independent sovereign state.

But if we look more closely and compare the political map of the Middle East with that of, say, Europe, certain significant differences emerge. Of the twenty-five or so states that make up the map of Europe, all but a few small exceptions, such as Belgium and Switzerland, have one important characteristic in common. The name of the country or nation is also the name of the dominant—sometimes the sole—ethnic group; it is also the name of the principal language used in that country, sometimes indeed only in that country. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia are only apparent exceptions, since both are modern names for old established national and cultural entities. Furthermore, this combination of ethnic, territorial, and linguistic nomenclature has existed for many centuries. Some of these countries, like England, France, Sweden, or Spain, attained national unity and sovereignty centuries ago; but even many which did not become sovereign states had names, languages, and cultures of their own, and a strong sense of territorial and national identity expressed in the writing and teaching of national history and the pursuit of national aims. In a few cases, such as Finland, Hungary, Greece, and, notably, Germany, the names by which they are known abroad are not the same as those that they use themselves, but the use of the same term for country, nation, and language remains. Even some of the smallest of these European political entities, such as Albania and Malta, have their own national languages, known in English as Albanian and Maltese. So essential is this feature of the European pattern of

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identity that even those nations which, like the Irish or the Norwegians, became accustomed during centuries of alien domination to use languages other than their own, have made great efforts to recover or reconstitute their lost national idioms.

In modern times, the European powers imposed their authority, and with it their parochial habits, on the rest of the world, in a process that extended beyond the limits of European imperial domination, and often survived after its ending. One of these habits was demarcating frontiers and drawing lines on maps. In the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, first America and then most of Asia and Africa were divided, demarcated, and often renamed, until the map of all the world conformed, at least in appearance, to the European pattern.

But the appearance was often deceptive. Of the countries that appear on the map of the present-day Middle East, only three conform to the European convergence of nation, country, and language: the republic of Turkey, which is inhabited by Turks who speak Turkish; Arabia, inhabited by Arabs who speak Arabic; and Iran, which in the West used to be called Persia, inhabited by Persians who speak Persian. However, the by-now general acceptance of the name Iran would appear to have changed this, since Iranian is the name of the larger language family to which Persian belongs and cannot correctly be applied to the national language of Iran.

If we look at the other two more closely, we find some curious features. The name "Turkey" has been used for that country since the twelfth century, but it had only been used by Europeans and was not adopted by the Turks themselves as the official name of their homeland until 1923. Before the final adoption of this name, there was some disagreement about the correct form and spelling of what was then still an unfamiliar term. The form finally adopted—*Türkiye*—clearly reveals the European origin of the name. If Turkish has borrowed and adapted a term for Turkey, Arabic still has no word for Arabia. There are of course words for "Arab," both as adjective and as substantive, and for Arabic as a language, but no territorial designation corresponding to "Arabia." Present-day Arabic usage resorts to such circumlocutions as the land or peninsula of the Arabs or the Arabian land or kingdom. Both terms, "Turkey" and "Arabia," as the names of sovereign states identified by their Turkishness or their Arabness, were adopted by their own inhabitants only in the twentieth century.

This brings us to another point of dissimilarity. In Europe the names, and for the most part the entities that they designate, are old, with a continuous history dating back at least to the Middle Ages and sometimes to antiquity. This is true even of those countries which, like Germany and Italy, did not achieve their unity until the nineteenth

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century, or those others that did not attain their independence until the twentieth century. The lines on the map—many of them, as in much of North America, obviously drawn with a ruler—that divide the present-day Middle East into sovereign states are, with few exceptions, new. And for the most part the entities that they designate are new, without precedent in the medieval or ancient past.

Even more remarkable is the difference in the character of the names themselves. The names by which the European states are known derive from their own languages and from their own history and designate continuing and self-conscious entities. The names on the map of the modern Middle East are, with few exceptions, restorations or reconstructions of ancient names, a surprisingly high proportion of them of alien origin. Some of these names belong to classical antiquity. Syria and Libya are both terms of disputed etymology, which first appear in Greek historical and geographical writings, and were adopted by the Roman administration as the names of provinces. From the time of the Arab conquest in the seventh century, they were virtually unknown in these and the surrounding countries and did not reappear until they were reintroduced as a result of the spread of Western influence. The name "Syria" came into local use, principally among non-Muslims, in the nineteenth century and became the official name of a state for the first time under the French Mandate. The republic established in the territory defined by the French Mandate was the first sovereign state ever to use the name "Syria," and its persistence in a light Arabic disguise as *Suriya* at the present day attests to the continuing power of European modes of thought even in so intimate a matter as national identity.

The return of "Libya" was even more dramatic. Its modern use seems to date from an Italian geographical work published in 1903, and it was given official existence for the first time by an Italian royal decree of January 1, 1934, which created a new colony, formed by the union of two Italian colonies, previously the Ottoman sanjaks of Barka (Cyrenaica) and Trablusgarp (Tripolitania), and called it Libya. All this makes it the more noteworthy that the sovereign states that emerged after the ending of French and Italian rule should have opted to retain these names, in place of those current in earlier Arabic usage.

A somewhat different case is that of Palestine, a name that in its present form derives from Greek usage. It became an administrative term in late Roman times. As the final syllable indicates, the word was in its origin an adjective, not a substantive, and was used in apposition to Syria. "Syria Palestina" was that part of southern Syria which in earlier times had been partly conquered and settled by the long-vanished Philistines. Unlike Syria, the Roman name "Palestine" persisted into the

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early centuries of Arab rule as the name of a district in the province of Damascus, but it was already obsolete when the Crusaders arrived in what they called the Holy Land at the end of the eleventh century. It reappeared in Europe after the revival of classical learning associated with the Renaissance, became part of the political language of the West, though not of the region, in the nineteenth century, and was adopted by Great Britain as the name of the British mandated territory constituted from the southernmost districts of the Ottoman provinces of Damascus and Beirut and the unattached district of Jerusalem. British imperial policy made Palestine, for the first time since the early Middle Ages, the name of a definite territory, though with frontiers quite different from those of either Roman or Arab administration, and also provided it, for the first time ever, with a Palestinian capital and government. Subsequent events, while removing these, may well have created a Palestinian nation.

Other names are of various patterns. Lebanon is a mountain, Jordan a river, Iraq the name of a medieval caliphal province comprising only the southern half of the present republic of Iraq. The pre-classical names have almost all disappeared. Israel, which alone is known by the same name, in the same language, though not with the same boundaries, as in antiquity, is an apparent, not a real, exception. Its presence is due not to a survival, but to a restoration, after a political discontinuity of almost two millennia. Egypt is known at home and in the Islamic world by the Arabic name *Misr,* from an ancient Semitic noun, probably meaning a march or border province; cognate names are used in Hebrew, Aramaic, and other Semitic languages. Elsewhere the country is known by derivatives of a Greek name, *Aigyptos,* the second syllable of which preserves a distant echo of one of the names of ancient Egypt—the same name as appears in the word *Copt.* But of the names by which the ancient Egyptians—and for that matter the ancient Assyrians, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Arameans, and others—knew themselves and their countries, no trace remains except in ancient writings and in the modern scholarship that has recovered and deciphered them.

In much of this, there are obvious similarities with the situation in the Americas. There, too, national, territorial, ethnic, and linguistic names rarely if ever coincide, and many of the sovereign states of the continent are known by names that reflect the fantasy, the book learning, or the convenience of their former conquerors and rulers. Part of this similarity is due to common experience. In the Middle East, as in the Americas and indeed in much of Africa, the positioning of the lines of the maps is a relic of the imperial age and reflects the conflicts and compromises of the former imperial powers. Many even of the names applied to the territories enclosed by these lines are part of the cultural baggage,

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the literary and historical preferences, of the departed imperial rulers.

But the Middle East is very different from the American continent, most of which, with the exception only of two areas, had no developed civilizations, no written languages, and no historical memories before the arrival of the conquistadores.

II

The Middle East is an area of ancient civilization, indeed, the most ancient in the world. But if we compare it with other civilizations of millennial antiquity, such as India and China, we shall at once be struck by two distinctive features of the Middle Eastern scene, in sharp contrast with the others.

One of these is diversity, the other discontinuity. Through the millennia of Chinese history there is an element of continuity, from the earliest to most recent times. Though many changes have occurred, modern China and ancient China use recognizable variants of the same language, written in variants of the same script, following variants of the same religion and philosophy. There is a continuity of self-awareness from the most ancient records of Chinese civilization to the present-day People's Republic, which is shared, despite many local differences, by the whole area of Chinese civilization. The same, though to a lesser extent, is true of India. Though Indian civilization is neither as exclusive nor as homogeneous as that of China, it remains a cohesive and unifying force. The Hindu religion, the Nagari script, the Sanskrit classics and scriptures, have always been a powerful, indeed a dominant element in Indian civilization and in India's awareness of itself as a continuing entity from antiquity to the present day.

In the ancient Middle East there was no such unity; from the ancient to the modern there is no such continuity. Even in antiquity, the civilizations of the Middle East were highly diverse, with no common binding elements like the Chinese or Nagari script, Confucian philosophy, or Hindu beliefs. Middle Eastern civilization began in a number of different places and evolved along different lines. And although these ultimately moved towards one another, they retained significant differences of culture, belief, and way of life.

But more important than these earlier differences is the dramatic discontinuity in the cultural history of the region. While India and China still cherish and study the records of their ancient past in an unbroken tradition of learning, the ancient Middle East was lost, forgotten, and literally buried. Its languages were dead, its writings locked in scripts that no one could read. Its gods and their worship belong to a remote antiquity known only to a small number of specialists and scholars. The

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Middle East lacks even a collective name, such as India and China. That indeed is why in our century it has come to be known, first in the Western world, then in other parts of the world, and finally among the peoples of the region itself, by the shapeless, formless, colorless, and ultimately meaningless designations, Middle East and Near East—designations that obviously lack the dignity, the stature, the evocative power of names like India and China.

The difference once stated, its causes are obvious. The submergence of the ancient Middle Eastern cultures and traditions was the result of a series of cataclysmic changes, the most important of which were the successive processes of Hellenization, Romanization, Christianization, and Islamization, which between them wiped out the greater part of the written culture of the ancient Middle East. All four processes have left their traces to the present day; the fourth, the Islamization of the Middle East, has shaped the region since the seventh century. The old languages—ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Hittite, old Iranian, and the rest—were abandoned and remained unknown until they were exhumed, deciphered, interpreted, and restored to history, or rather to historiography, and ultimately to the peoples who live in the region. For a long time the effort was exclusively the work of non-Middle Easterners, and it remains predominantly so. The perceived link with pre-Islamic antiquity, in the corporate self-consciousness of the Middle Eastern peoples, is still tenuous; of late it has indeed been actively challenged by an Islamic revival.

Another comparison, this time with Europe, may be instructive. The barbarian peoples who overran the western Roman Empire made great efforts to preserve at least the forms and structures of the Roman state. They adopted its religion, Christianity, tried to use its language, Latin, and made great efforts to fit their own barbarian rule into the forms of Roman Imperial government and law. The Muslim Arabs, who in the seventh and eighth centuries conquered a large part of the Christian Roman Empire in the Middle East and North Africa, did no such thing. On the contrary, they brought their own religion, Islam, their own language, Arabic, and their own scripture, the Qur'ān, and they established their own imperial state. Though this state, inevitably, was affected by influences from its non-Islamic predecessors and neighbors, the advent of Islamic domination nevertheless clearly marked the beginning of a new society and more particularly of a new polity, in which Islam was not only the basis of identity, but also the source of legitimacy and authority. In this newly established Islamic world, the Arabic language assumed the role played by Greek in the Hellenistic world, Latin in the West, Sanskrit and Chinese in the civilizations of the East. For some time, Arabic was virtually the sole language of govern-

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ment, law, and administration, as well as of commerce and culture and everyday life. And even when, in time, other literary languages, notably Persian and Turkish, appeared or reappeared in the Islamic world, they were written in the Arabic script and had adopted an Arabic vocabulary as extensive and as important as the Latin and Greek elements in the languages of the West.

By the end of the Middle Ages, the religious and linguistic map of the Middle East and North Africa was fixed in what has remained, with certain exceptions, its modern form. Three languages predominated—Arabic, Persian, and Turkish—each of them used in several forms and in several countries. Arabic—with a common, standard written form and a wide variety of spoken dialects—had become the dominant language not only in the Arabian peninsula, where it was first used, but also in the Fertile Crescent, comprising the present-day states of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel, and in all the countries of the North African littoral, from Egypt to Morocco, with some extensions southward into sub-Saharan Africa.

Persian—*zaban-i Farsi,* the language of the province of Fars, or Pars, from which the Greek and hence the Western names of the country are derived—was spoken and written in Iran (the ancient name of the country), and in a zone extending eastward into Central Asia, in regions now included in Afghanistan and in the Soviet republic of Tajikistan. Tajik and Dari, one of the two official languages of Afghanistan (the other is Pashto, also of the Iranic family), are variants of Persian.

The Turkish or Turkic languages, a closely related group of which Ottoman Turkish is the westernmost representation, were spoken in a vast region extending from the northern and southern shores of the Black Sea, across Asia, to the Pacific.

Apart from those three major languages, a number of other languages remained in local use. Some, like Aramaic and Coptic, survivals of more ancient cultures, were used to a diminishing extent by non-Muslim, mostly Christian minorities; others, like Berber and Kurdish, are still widely used by great numbers, but without a written form, and therefore without the stability and continuity that a written tradition can provide. Hebrew, which survived as a language of religion and culture among the Jewish minorities, has in modern times reappeared as a spoken and eventually a national language.

The religious map of the region was overwhelmingly Islamic. Beginning as a small but dominant minority of conquerors, in time the Muslims, by immigration and, to a far greater extent, by conversion, became the majority, while the followers of the previous religions—Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians of various churches—dwindled into minorities in the countries where they had once predominated.

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III

During the last few hundred years the political map of the Middle East has undergone many changes, not only in nomenclature, but also in both its external limits and its internal divisions. At the beginning of the sixteenth century there were three major powers in the heartlands of Islam, with their capitals in Tabriz, in Istanbul, and in Cairo. The oldest of the three states, that of the Mamluk Sultans, ruled over Egypt, the Syrian lands, and Western Arabia. The newly created dynasty of the Safavid Shahs—a regime of radical Shi'a—ruled over Iran and also Iraq. The Ottoman sultans governed Asia Minor and a rapidly growing area in southeastern Europe, which, at its peak, included the whole of the Balkan peninsula and half of Hungary. West of Egypt, a series of Muslim states shared the North African littoral as far as the Atlantic. Of mixed Arab and Berber population, they were overwhelmingly Arab in language and culture. North of Turkey and Iran, another group of Muslim states ruled in Central Asia and in the lands between, and north of, the Caspian and Black seas. Of mixed Turkish and Mongol origin, they were mainly Turkish, partly Persian, in language, and shared a common Turko-Persian culture.

In the course of the sixteenth century, a number of major changes took place. The first was the rapid expansion of Ottoman power. By defeating and destroying the Mamluk sultanate, the Ottoman sultans incorporated the Mamluk dominions—Syria, Palestine, Egypt, much of Arabia—into their own realms and extended their suzerainty to North Africa as far as the Moroccan frontier. In a series of struggles with the Shahs, the Ottoman sultans, though they never conquered Iran, were able to absorb Iraq, thus establishing their control over virtually the whole of the Arab world excepting only Morocco and the remoter mountains and deserts of the Arabian peninsula. In the north, by mostly peaceful means, Ottoman influence and suzerainty were extended to the Turkish and the Tatar principalities on the northern and eastern shores of the Black Sea, which became in effect an Ottoman lake. In Europe they advanced as far as the walls of Vienna, to which they twice—unsuccessfully—laid siege.

The second major event of the sixteenth century was the resurgence and expansion of Europe. After a century and a half of inconclusive struggle in the plains of Hungary, the Austrians and their allies succeeded in driving the Ottomans out of central Europe, though centuries more would pass before the Turks finally withdrew from all but a small corner of the Balkan peninsula. At the same time a new expansion was beginning at both ends of Europe, which by the nineteenth century brought almost the whole world of Islam into the orbit of European

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domination or influence. At both ends, the expansion began with a liberation—the freeing of Moscovy from the yoke of the Islamized Tatars, who had dominated it since the thirteenth century; and the expulsion from Spain and Portugal of the Moors, who had ruled large parts of the Iberian peninsula for almost eight hundred years. When the reconquest was completed, both Russian and Iberian Christians did not pause but went on to pursue their former masters into their homelands in Asia and Africa.

The Ottomans, already halted on the Danube and in the Mediterranean, began to feel the probing fingers of Europe even in their Islamic domains. In the eastern seas, beyond their Arabian conquests, they encountered the naval power of the Portuguese, followed by the other, far stronger maritime states of western Europe; in the steppe lands, they were halted and ultimately driven back by the relentless advance of Russia towards the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, and the heart of Asia.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans and Persians were confined to their present northern frontiers, and the old Muslim principalities of central Asia were incorporated in the Russian empire. At about the same time, the West European powers were encroaching on the Arab lands, both inside and outside the Ottoman Empire. By 1914 only the countries of the Fertile Crescent remained under direct Ottoman rule, and they, too, shared the same fate after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the partition of its non-Turkish territories among the victorious allies.

But in the meantime other changes had been taking place in the regions nominally under the sovereignty or suzerainty of the Ottomans. In four areas in particular the decline of Ottoman power, sometimes also the influence of rival European interests, permitted the emergence of independent centers of Arab power. One of these was Egypt. Governed since 1517 by an Ottoman pasha, it had become virtually autonomous. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century it was ruled by a dynasty which, in successive phases, transformed a hereditary autonomous governorship into an independent monarchy. Though not of Egyptian origin, and for long unresponsive to Arab or even Egyptian national sentiments, these rulers nevertheless helped to open the way for the development of the modern Egyptian nation state through the successive and overlapping phases of Ottoman suzerainty, British occupation, British protectorate, and, finally, sovereign independence.

Another kind of autonomy was achieved by Lebanon, which, of all the new states created in the Fertile Crescent after 1918, was the only one with roots in the recent past. Because of its distinctive character as a mountain community of fiercely independent minorities, Lebanon had achieved a high degree of autonomy even under Ottoman rule. There

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was a Lebanese political society, with its own rulers and its own governing elite, subject to an Ottoman control that was often no more than nominal.

The vast, inhospitable, and at that time impoverished lands of the Arabian peninsula had never been under effective Ottoman rule, nor, before the discovery and exploitation of oil, did they seem worth the effort. The only part that mattered was the province of the Hijaz, containing Mecca and Medina. Here, because of the centrality of these cities in the Islamic world community of which the Ottoman sultans were claiming the leadership, as well as because of the importance of the pilgrimage, the Turks maintained garrisons, which did not in fact surrender until after the final defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. Elsewhere in the peninsula, they had to make do with a loose suzerainty, of varying effectiveness. In most of Arabia this meant abandoning real power to local and tribal rulers, some of them under British influence or protection.

Only in two places did important centers emerge, which later became the nuclei of sovereign states. One of these was the Yemen, in the southwestern corner of Arabia—a region of distinctive and ancient cultural traditions, going back to remote pre-Islamic times. For some centuries past, the Yemen had been ruled by a kind of religious monarchy, under the dynasty of the Imams. The Ottomans had inherited a claim to suzerainty over the Yemen from the Mamluk Sultans of Egypt, whom they overthrew in 1517. They were never able to enforce it for any length of time, and the cost, in blood and treasure, of their attempts to do so left a deep scar on Turkish consciousness. After the end of the Ottoman Empire, the Yemen became fully sovereign and was able to avoid the fate of most of the other former Ottoman provinces. Only the southernmost part of the ancient Yemeni kingdom remained a British colony and protectorate, and after independence became a separate state, officially designated as South Yemen.

The influence of the Yemen in the rest of the Arab world was minimal, partly because of its remoteness, partly because of the adherence of the Imams and the ruling elite to the Zaidi sect of Shi'ism. Of far greater importance, in its influence on the Arab and indeed the Islamic world, was another principality that rose in the eighteenth century in the northern Arabian highlands of Najd. The political and military gifts of a tribal chief, Muhammad ibn Sa'ud, reinforced by the teaching and guidance of a reformist and puritanical theologian, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, created a new and immensely dynamic force in the peninsula. After some serious setbacks, this new principality was able to establish a high degree of effective independence under an increasingly nominal Ottoman suzerainty. In the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat,

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Sa'udi leadership and Wahhabi fervor combined to transform the principality of Najd into a kingdom covering the greater part of Arabia, to which, like the Ottomans before them, they gave their dynastic name. In 1926 the Sa'udis conquered the Hijaz, which had become independent after the ending of Ottoman suzerainty, and thus acquired the two holy cities and the immense prestige that they conferred upon their rulers. In 1932, in a short war, they defeated the Yemeni Imam and extended Sa'udi rule as far as the northern and eastern borders of Yemen.

IV

In the north, the retreat of the Middle East before Europe seems to have been permanent, and the lands beyond the Turkish and Persian borders, though still inhabited by an overwhelming majority of Turkish- and Persian-speaking Muslims, are still incorporated in a political system with its capital in Europe. In the west, the process of imperial expansion was halted and reversed, and a series of entirely new states emerged. Not the least important element in their emergence was the growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of a new sense of national identity, particularly in those countries under European rule or influence.

In traditional Middle Eastern societies there were three recognized levels of cohesion and allegiance: religion, or more precisely, the religious community; the state, in practice normally a dynastic ruler; and a third, lower level, within the community and below the state, which might be called local. This local loyalty group might be tribal, sectarian, regional, social, even professional; often it was defined by the overlapping of more than one of these. Countries and nations existed; they had names, and evoked sentiments of a kind. But they were not seen as defining political identities or directing political allegiances. They did not attract the attention of traditional historians, who preferred to narrate the fortunes of empires, dynasties, and cities. In the nineteenth century, two new concepts were introduced from Europe: the idea of identity and loyalty by country—that is, patriotism—and by language and presumed ethnic origin—that is, nationalism. In the Middle East, unlike Western Europe but much like Central Europe, patriotic and nationalist definitions did not coincide and often clashed. Both were alien, but both had enormous influence.

The first of these ideas to reach the Middle East was patriotism. The point of arrival was the Ottoman Empire, a dynastic state whose multinational, multi-denominational population made it somewhat unreceptive to French- or English-style patriotic appeals. It was not until after the First World War, when a relatively homogeneous Turkish

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nation-state emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, that patriotism took firm root. Patriotic ideas also began to affect Egypt and some other countries, but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century nationalist ideologies, of Central and East European origin, evoked a far more powerful response among the mixed populations of the old and new empires.

The unification of Germany brought hope and inspiration to many in the Middle East, who saw in these events a way to escape from the division and subjugation from which they suffered. The first state to aspire to the role of a Prussia or Sardinia was the Ottoman Empire. At first, Ottoman leaders saw this role in Islamic terms—as the guidance, perhaps eventually the unification, of world Islam under the leadership of the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph. Others, more open to European ideas, saw the role in Turkish terms—as the liberation and unification of all the Turkish peoples under the leadership of the Turks of Turkey. These aspirations were known, respectively, as pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. A parallel pan-Arab movement won considerable support in the Arab lands, especially in the 1930s and 1940s. Pan-Iranism, concerned with a much smaller area and population, had far less influence.

Of these larger, ethnic movements, pan-Arabism was the most influential and, for a while, the most successful. The Turkish movement failed entirely. The vast majority of the Turkish peoples still live under non-Turkish regimes, in Iran, Afghanistan, China, and above all the Soviet Union, and the Turkish republic remains the only segment of the Turkish world that enjoys sovereign independence. The Arabs, in contrast, have won independence almost everywhere, and twenty member states of the Arab League attest this victory. Though political union eluded them, and now seems unlikely, their independence has helped to create and develop a sense of cultural community.

Unlike the Turks, the Arabs were deprived of unity by internal rather than external factors. One of the most important of these was the growth of national, and ultimately patriotic loyalties within the separate states into which the Arab world was divided.

In time, these patriotic and nationalist movements found a new ideological expression for what was previously conceived and presented as a struggle for Islam against the infidels. The peoples of the Islamic world were acquiring new pasts, and with these new pasts came a new and different sense of their own present identity and future aspirations.

The recovery by the peoples of the Middle East of their ancient history and eventually of their ancient identity was due above all to two causes: the pertinacity of their own non-Muslim minorities, and the curiosity and determination of strangers who came from Europe. At the dawn of modern history, all that Christian Europe knew about the

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ancient Middle East was what was contained in the writings of two peoples, active in antiquity, who had retained both their memories and their voices—the Greeks and the Jews. The Muslims, who read neither the classics nor the Bible, were even worse placed and relied for what little they knew on Qur'anic versions of biblical stories.

But there was in their midst another possible source of information, in religious communities as ancient and as pertinacious as the Jews and with roots going back to remote antiquity. Two in particular preserved written traditions connecting them with their ancestors: the Christian Copts of Egypt and the Zoroastrians, also known as the Parsees, of Iran and India. These communities held the keys that enabled European scholars in time to unlock the secrets of the ancient Middle Eastern past. One such scholar was a German Jesuit named Athanasius Kircher, who died in 1680 and was the first major European scholar in the field of Coptic studies. He studied under Coptic priests, learned how to read their ancient language, compiled Coptic grammars and dictionaries, and thus took the first essential step which, generations later, made possible the decipherment of the Egyptian hieroglyphs. Another was the French philologist Anquetil-Duperron, who made his way to India, sat at the feet of Parsee priests, edited and translated some of the Zoroastrian scriptures, and thus, too, opened the way for the decipherment, at a later date, of the ancient Iranian inscriptions.

In its origins this whole process, of what came to be known as Egyptology, Assyriology, Iranology, and other parallel disciplines in the study of the ancient Middle East, was exclusively and entirely the preoccupation of European and, later, American scholars. The discovery, care, decipherment, evaluation, and interpretation of these records of the ancient past was a non–Middle Eastern enterprise and achievement, and for a long time it had no influence on the peoples and cultures of the Islamic Middle East, who retained their previous lack of interest in their own pagan past. For them, significant history began with the advent of Islam. That was their own, their true history, the history that mattered. What came before was an age of ignorance, of no value and with nothing to teach.

A new phase and a new attitude with regard to the national past—an expression for which for the first time now acquired a meaning in these parts—began in Egypt and spread at a later date to other Middle Eastern countries. There were several circumstances in Egypt that favored this change. One is the very character of Egypt as a country—the green gash of the Nile, opening out into the delta with the desert on both sides. There can hardly be another country in the world, the identity and distinctness of which are so clearly stamped by geography as well as history. It was much easier for the Egyptians to develop a sense of

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Egyptian identity than for other countries where the borders, both geographical and ethnic, merge imperceptibly into those of their neighbors. Egypt also had what were probably not only the most impressive remains of antiquity, but also the most accessible. In Iran one had to go to Persepolis or to Behistun, in Turkey to Bogazköy, in Iraq to Nineveh and other remote places, often involving difficult and dangerous journeys, which only Orientalists had the incentive to undertake. In Egypt some of the most impressive monuments of Pharaonic antiquity were a stone's throw from major places of habitation. They were things that people could see, had indeed grown up seeing, and the new message of patriotic pride was therefore much easier to convey.

Egypt was also, for a long time, the country in the Middle East that, apart from Turkey, was most open to European contacts and therefore to European influences, intellectual as well as political and commercial. Another factor of some relevance is that Egypt in the nineteenth century was ruled by a nominally vassal dynasty with separatist ambitions, and therefore with a definite interest in fostering the notion of a separate Egyptian identity within the Ottoman Empire of which Egypt was then a province. In 1868 Shaykh Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Tahtāwī, an Egyptian scholar who had spent some years in France, published a book on the history of Egypt from the beginnings to the Arab conquest. That is to say, his history ended where, until then, Arabic historiography in Egypt had begun; it covered the hitherto unknown prehistory of the country. It was an epoch-making book, not only in the development of Egyptian historiography, but also in the development of the self-awareness of the Egyptians of themselves as a nation. This was the beginning of a process that added several thousand years to what the Egyptians knew about their own history, and it was followed by several very rapid developments—the publication of many books, first translations then original works, the growth of Egyptology among Egyptians themselves, and a new kind of history teaching in the schools.

It also marked the beginning of what has become a continuing tension between the two Egyptian personalities: the one Arab Islamic, its culture Arabic, its history that of Islam; the other Egyptian and, so to speak, pharaonic, defining itself not in religious and communal but in national and patriotic terms. This was a new and different type of loyalty, based on a new and different sense of identity.

Obviously this dichotomy had considerable political implications. The one identity drew Egypt in the direction of pan-Arab or even pan-Islamic causes, the other towards a territorially based Western-style patriotism. The latter is often called Egyptianism or, by people in other Arab countries, pharaonism, a word used with hostile intent. The Arabic is *tafar'un*, which literally means pretending to be pharaonic.

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This movement in Egypt was first opposed, condemned, even derided in other Arabic-speaking countries. It was seen as something artificial, as a parochial attempt to create a little Egypt within the greater Arab or Islamic brotherhood. It was denounced by pan-Arabs as separatist, by religious people as neo-pagan, and by both as divisive. Nevertheless, the example of Egypt had an influence in other Middle Eastern lands. Egypt was by far the most advanced country, intellectually, in the Arab world, with considerable influence not only among the Arabs but wherever Arabic was read, and that meant, at that time, virtually the whole Islamic world. Parallel movements developed among other peoples, often again with significant political and even territorial undertones and overtones.

A similar recovery and repossession of the past occurred in Iraq, though there it was slower and later than in Egypt. The Iraqis, too, could claim ancient and glorious ancestors—the Sumerians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, who also left massive and imposing artifacts. But for a variety of reasons, the development of this kind of national archaeology was slower and later in Iraq than in Egypt. And when Iraqis claim the Assyrians and Babylonians as their glorious ancestors and predecessors, they grant them a kind of retroactive posthumous Arab naturalization, and speak of their ancestors as ancient Arabs, rather than of themselves as modern Assyro-Babylonians. The ancient Assyrian and Babylonian language, though not Arabic, is, unlike Egyptian, of the Semitic family, and this affinity helped to soften, though not entirely to obviate, the clash of national identities and histories.

In recent years, and particularly under the shock of the war with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the evocation of antiquity has become more common and more urgent. Iraq is a deeply divided country. Religiously, a Sunni ascendancy rules a Shi'ite majority, and the Shi'ites, though Arab, share the faith of the Persians. Ethnically, an Arab majority dominates a Kurdish minority—and the Kurdish language belongs neither to the Arabic nor the Semitic family, but is related to Persian as Portuguese is to Spanish. The concept of an ancient Iraqi nation, territorially defined, with roots reaching back to remote antiquity, could be a powerful unifying force, and it is not surprising that Iraqi leaders have had frequent recourse to it. President Saddam Hussein had often referred to Nebuchadnezzar as an Iraqi hero, commending in particular his expeditious handling of the Zionist problem in his day.

The rediscovery came still later in Iran, when Iranian intellectuals read European scholarship and literature and began to realize that they, too, had an ancient and glorious past to which they could lay claim. In Iran as in Egypt the ancient past had been forgotten and to an even greater extent obliterated. In Persepolis, the ancient Persian capital, the

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Muslim conquerors had hacked away the faces of the Medes and Persians depicted in the friezes, seeing in them an expression of pagan idolatry. Only the most recent history, that of the Sassanid shahs who ruled Iran on the eve of the Arab conquest, was known at all, and that only in sketchy form, and from Arab sources. The more ancient history of Iran was forgotten, and even the name of Cyrus was unknown.

The first modern Iranian writings about ancient Iran appeared in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. They were still on a rather small scale and based entirely on Western sources, mostly French. Cyrus, the founder of the Persian state, did not become a popular hero until the present century, when he became known through two historical novels in which he figured as hero, the one published in 1919, the other in 1921. The cult of antiquity in Iran reached its height under the Pahlavi dynasty, which ruled from 1925 to 1979. The information about antiquity used by modern Iranian historians and novelists was for a long time derived exclusively from Western sources—that is, ultimately, from the Greeks and the Bible. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, histories of Iran were beginning to include the ancient empires, departing for the first time from the heroic mythologies that until then had provided the only accounts of ancient Iran available in the Persian language.

The case of Iran is somewhat paradoxical. The rediscovery of antiquity in that country came rather later than in Iraq and Syria, much later than in Egypt. It was the last of the major Middle Eastern Muslim countries to recover its memory of antiquity. And yet it was, after the advent of Islam, the first to recover some sense of identity after the shock of the Arab conquests. Of all the countries of southwest Asia and North Africa conquered and Islamized by the Arabs in the seventh and eighth centuries, Iran alone retained its language. West of Iran, from Iraq all the way to the Atlantic, the old languages were supplanted by Arabic. The Aramaic that was spoken in Iraq and Syria, the Coptic that was spoken in Egypt, the Greek and the Latin that had been languages of culture and government in all the former Roman and Byzantine provinces, either vanished entirely or survived as the ritual languages of small religious minorities. The Iranians did not lose their language. Though they adopted Arabic as the language of religion and law, of culture and science, and contributed mightily to Arab culture, they did not become Arabic speakers; nor did they become Arabs, as eventually happened to all the others to the west of them, in the Fertile Crescent and in North Africa. They retained their language and their identity, albeit in a different form. The change from Zoroastrian to Islamic Persian offers interesting parallels to the transition from Anglo-Saxon to Middle English after the Norman Conquest of England. Persian was now written in the Arabic script, not in the older *pahlavi* script, which was preserved

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only by the Zoroastrians. It also underwent major grammatical and still more lexical changes. Its grammar, like Anglo-Saxon grammar, was broken down and simplified under the pressures of conquerors who spoke another language. Its intellectual and spiritual vocabulary was almost entirely Arabic, rather like the French and classical vocabulary of post-Conquest English. But it was still Persian. It was not Arabic and did not even belong to the same family of languages as Arabic.

It is not difficult to see reasons why the Persians, though they adopted Islam with as great an enthusiasm as any other Muslim people, nevertheless did not adopt an Arab identity. The Arabs conquered Iran not from another alien ruler, but from a great Iranian empire, that of the Sassanid shahs. And the Iranians, unlike their neighbors to the west, were still sustained by fresh and recent memories of independence and greatness. The countries west of Iran—Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa—were all long-subjugated provinces of distant empires, and had undergone many changes of government, law, religion, culture, and even language. The process of eradicating the ancient past was already far advanced when the Arabs arrived.

None of this had happened in Iran, and it was therefore not surprising that, after a century or two of Arab-Muslim rule, there was a cultural awakening—a revival of the Persian language and the emergence of a new Persian national culture, deeply influenced by Arabic and imbued with the spirit of Islam, but nevertheless unmistakably Persian and differing from Arab Islam in several significant respects. In the Persian literature of the time, and even in Arabic literature written by Persians, there is an awareness of difference, a sense of historic and cultural identity. Persian poets speak with pride of their double inheritance, of the religion of Muhammad and the glory of Chosroes, of the by-now mythical heroes of ancient Iran. This was a process that had no parallel elsewhere in the Middle Eastern and North African Islamic world, until the coming of the Turks.

A recent writer, discussing the questions of national identity in the classical Islamic world, remarked that "Egypt in medieval Islam was neither a country nor a nation; just a place." That is perhaps an overstatement, carrying the point further than is justified. But it does contain an important element of truth as far as Egypt and, still more, other countries are concerned. It was not true of Iran, which was always considerably more than a place. Iran may not have been a coherent political entity like Egypt, still less a nation or a country in the modern sense of these words, but it was certainly a notion, a concept. There was a feeling of such an entity as Iran, conceived not in political but in cultural terms, and an awareness expressed above all in language and especially in poetry. The pride of the Persians in their own language and in their own literary traditions is familiar to any who have had dealings

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with them. It is expressed in particular in the great Persian epics that purport to tell the noble and heroic deeds of ancient Iran. They have nothing whatever to do with the history of ancient Iran, which by that time was already forgotten. The great deeds related in *Shahnama*, the famous Persian book of kings, derive from a mythical not a real history. But the myth served to buttress and to reinforce this sense of Persian national identity within the Islamic fold.

Some have seen in Shi'ism a form of Persian national self-expression, even a Persian revolt against Sunni Arabism. This view, popular at a time when racial theories were still influential in Western political thought, is far-fetched and untenable. For many centuries after the advent of Islam, Shi'ism had no ethnic or territorial label. It was brought to Iran, like Islam itself, by Arabs, and it would seem that the majority of Persian Muslims were loyal Sunnis. But from the sixteenth century onward, Shi'ism became the state religion of Iran, which, moreover, was the only Shi'ite state of significance in the Islamic world. Not only was Iran a militant Shi'ite state, it was also surrounded on all sides by Sunni states—the Ottoman Empire in the west, the Central Asian and Indian Sunni states to the east, and there was thus, inevitably, an interpenetration between Shi'ite religion and Iranian cultural and political self-awareness. The frontiers of Iran were also the frontiers of Shi'ite political power, and the wars between the Shahs of Iran and their neighbors often had a religious, or at least a sectarian, content.

The Turkish case is very different from that of other peoples of the region. The Turks came into the Middle East from Central Asia, where they had already embraced Islam, and their conquest and settlement of the country that came to be known as Turkey dated only from the eleventh century. Until their arrival, the country was predominantly Greek in language and culture and Christian in religion, and any attempt to identify with these, in the age of archaeological self-rediscovery, was clearly impossible. The Turks therefore looked beyond the Greek colonists of Asia Minor to the ancient inhabitants of the peninsula and saw themselves as the successors of the ancient Anatolian peoples, notably the Hittites. The Palestinian Arabs confronted the same problem in a more acute form. Had the Jews disappeared like most of the peoples of antiquity, the Palestinians might have claimed to be the heirs of ancient Israel, as the Egyptians were of the pharaohs and the Iraqis of the kings of Babylon. But the Jews had not disappeared and were even returning, and the Palestinians therefore sought their legitimacy in the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Palestine, the Canaanites. In Syria the survival of Aramaic Christianity presented the same problem in a much milder form. At one time Aramaic culture was particularly associated with the Christian minority and even with the Christian-led Syrian

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Popular Party, to such a point that any reference to Aramaic culture was seen as a politically seditious act. That phase appears to have passed, and the Aramaeans are now acceptable as legitimate ancestors of modern Syria.

In Lebanon there was for a while a tendency among some Lebanese, vehemently opposed by other Lebanese, to identify with the ancient Phoenicians who had lived along that strip of the Levant coast. This view was to be found principally among Christians, more particularly among westward-looking Maronite Christians, who saw in it a way of differentiating themselves from their Arab and Islamic neighbors. It commands very little support at the present time. The Phoenician settlers in North Africa, however, who founded the city and civilization of Carthage, have been adopted as both Arabs and ancestors in Tunisia and to some extent in Algeria. These arguments are in no way impeded by the fact that the Carthaginian, Phoenician, and Canaanite languages belong to the same subgroup of Semitic as Hebrew.

V

For most of the last fourteen centuries, the determinant of identity and loyalty in the Middle East has been religion—not country, not language, not ethnic origin, but membership of the religio-political community of Islam. The attempt during the last hundred years to introduce new political loyalties based on such themes as patriotism and nationalism was due very largely to the working of foreign, chiefly European, ideas, which are now denounced and rejected as such by those who seek a return to what they regard as authentic Islamic values. The attempt to return to an Islamic or, as Westerners sometimes call it, a pan-Islamic political identity, was not new. It has in the past century been encouraged by a number of Muslim rulers, including the Ottomans under both the old and the Young Turks, and the kings of Egypt and Arabia. These state-directed campaigns of pan-Islam all failed, no doubt because they were seen, with some justification, as attempts to mobilize Islamic feelings for the purposes of one or another Islamic state. There was also a more popular and more radical pan-Islam, which won rather greater support. But this, too, was often sponsored by more radical states and seen as serving state purposes, perhaps without or even against the wishes of the participants. When nationalist ideas of the European type first appeared in the Islamic Middle East, there were some who denounced them as divisive and irreligious. Today, after a long period during which nationalist ideologies reigned unchallenged, the same criticism is being heard again. A recent book by one ʿAbd al-Fattāh Mazlūm, entitled *The Sedition of Nationalism in the Islamic World,* argues

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that nationalism, which is the same as racism, was introduced to the Islamic world by "arrogant infidels," mainly Jewish, so as to divide the Muslims and turn them against one another.

But even those who oppose and reject nationalism seem unable to escape from its grip. The Turkish poet Mehmet Akif, a deeply religious man and a bitter critic of ethnic nationalism, went into self-imposed exile when the Turkish Republic was proclaimed, but one of his poems was adopted as the Turkish national anthem. Khomeini has proclaimed, more than once, that there are no frontiers in Islam—but the government of his Islamic Republic has refused to return three Arabian islands in the Gulf that the Shah had seized, and the constitution of the Islamic Republic lays down that the president must be of Iranian birth and origin. This was no formality, since a candidate of Iranian birth and Afghan parentage was excluded on these grounds. These demands are more rigorous than those of the American constitution, in which American birth suffices for the presidency.

The war between Iraq and Iran has demonstrated in an interesting way the insufficiency of both ethnic and sectarian appeals. When the Iraqis invaded Iran, they hoped that the large Arab population of the Iranian province of Khuzistan would welcome them. They did not, but remained faithful to their Iranian allegiance. The Iranians in turn hoped that the large Shi'ite population of Iraq would rally to the cause of the Shi'ite Islamic Republic. Some of them indeed did so, but the vast majority of Iraqi Shi'ites remain loyal to their country. All over the Middle East, not only in old nations like Iran and Egypt, but even in some of the newest and most artificial, the state—the ganglion of interrelated, interacting interests and loyalties at the center of coercive power—is once again becoming the primary focus of political loyalty and identity. Like South America, which it in many ways resembles, the Arab world consists of a large number of separate states. They have a great deal in common—in language and culture, religion and society, history and destiny. As in South America, there was a moment, after the crumbling of empires, when they might have fashioned a greater unity. They did not, and the moment passed. In language and culture, the growth of literacy and the improvement of communication will no doubt bring greater unity. In politics, it would seem that their destiny is one of separate political statehood, becoming nationhood. The lines that colonial soldiers and administrators and imperial diplomats drew on the map of the Middle East and North Africa have hardened, and their power to enclose and to divide is likely to endure for some time to come.

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Borders

JAMES L. CALDERWOOD

What they say is untrue, that I loved her not, for her
I sailed the sea to Lesbos years ago; it's just
That it was hard to keep all things so neat, and yet
The house and I were neat because I did
As I was told, I kept my place, I kept her place,
I washed the fence that kept us from the house
Next door, I posed if asked, and watched her paint.
The critics said she made small worlds apart,
Abstract, inside the world, inside the ornate frames
She had me make, just so, they had to be
Just so, and then each day at four I cleaned
Her palette board because she could not stand
The messy pigments oozing. So I took
The turpentine and made it neat, and with
A palette knife inside a rag, just so, I cleaned
The ornate frames because it would not do, she said,
If they were smudged; and then I locked the doors
With special locks, the windows too, because outside,
She said, the streetgang black Latino Arab men
In flat-brimmed hats tatoos long knives and guns
Would rape us kill us us alone two ladies helpless
To do what to do? We'd keep inside, she said,
We'd keep inside, just so, and she would paint
And I would keep my place and keep her place.
And so I did until the night I woke and went
In silence through the house with palette knife
In hand to where she slept I think a black
Latino Arab man with palette knife got in

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Though all the locks were locked and all the frames
Unsmudged she must have seen the Arab man
Because she looked at me and seized the gun
Beside her bed and screamed and ran and locked
Herself inside the bath it would not do I saw
Not do at all I hacked the door with all
My might that kept us so apart and heard her
Scream and scream and heard the shot and when
I got inside her head was inside out or out-
Side in such reds and grays and whites all spread
Across the palette of her skull across
The azure paper on the wall across the image
In the mirror of the black Latino Arab man
Who looked at me and looked like me I saw
It would not do not do at all and yet
The turpentine I got could never make it all
Just so

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What's Wrong With Babel?

LEON R. KASS

THE BOOK OF GENESIS IS LARGELY AN ACCOUNT of the beginnings of the people of Israel. Beginning with God's call of Abraham in chapter 12, it narrates the trials of the founders—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and their households, as God Himself directly leads one people to follow His chosen path. But before the coming of this new way, Genesis presents an account of human beginnings universally considered, employing tales of men and women functioning largely on their own and left to their own devices. The last episode of that universal human story is the famous tale of the city and tower of Babel, presented economically in the first nine verses of the eleventh chapter of Genesis. As everybody knows, God disrupts the building of the city, confounding the speech of the builders and scattering them abroad upon the face of the earth.

Here is the story.

1. And the whole earth was of one language and one speech.
2. And as they journeyed about from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they settled there.
3. And they said, one man to his neighbor, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly [literally, "to a burning"]";
   And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.
4. And they said, "Come, let us build for us a city with a tower, with its top [or "head"] in the heavens;
   And let us make for us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth."
5. But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man [or "children of Adam"—*benêy ha'âdâm*] were building.
6. And the Lord said, "Behold, it is one people, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined [or "plotted"—*zâmam*] to do.

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7. "Come, let us go down and confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

8. So the Lord scattered them from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they ceased to build the city.

9. Therefore is the name of it called Babel [*bâbel*], because the Lord did there confound [*bâlal*] the language of all the earth; and from thence did the Lord scatter them upon the face of the earth.

The building of the city and tower is an expression of powerful human impulses, at first toward safety and permanence, eventually toward full independence and self-sufficiency, and accomplished entirely by rational and peaceful means: by forethought and planning, by arts to transform the given world, and by cooperative social arrangements made possible by common speech and uniform thoughts. This ancient story encapsulates a recurrent human dream of universal human community living in peace and freedom, no longer at the mercy of an inhospitable or hostile nature, and enjoying a life no longer solitary, nasty, poor, brutish, and short. The universal city is the bearer and embodiment of this dream. According to the story, however, God finds this dream a nightmare. Taking strong objection to the city of man, He thwarts its completion by measures designed to make it permanently impossible. Why?

Given that the human beings want the city but God does not, our first impulse is to think that the answer depends on knowing God's reasons or seeing things from His point of view. Of this, all that we know is contained in God's remark, no doubt uttered with a negative judgment, "Now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do" (verse 6). God, it seems, sees the likely success of the project, but doesn't approve it. He does not approve of the prospect of unrestrained human powers, exercised in support of unlimited imaginings and desires. More generally, He may not like the absence of reverence, the vaunt of pride, the trust in technique, the quest for material power, the aspiration for self-sufficiency, the desire to reach into heaven—in short, the implied wish to be as gods, with comparable creative power. From God's point of view, the city of man is, in its deepest meaning, at best a form of idolatry, and at worst, a great threat to the earth.

Why should we, enlightened readers, take God's view of the matter? Should we not cherish the hopes of our fellows, those first dreamers of the humanistic dream? After all, we are told, all mankind without exception thought the project right and good. Absent a meddlesome God, would there be any reason to disagree? And if a meddlesome God is *truly* absent, would there not be every reason to revive the dream? If there is no city of God, the city of man is not only not idolatry—it becomes our last best hope.

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The careful study of the biblical story suggests that this view is mistaken, that God's judgments and actions regarding Babel are entirely fitting, and on grounds accessible to human reason. Pondering the building of Babel, in the context of what precedes and follows, we may ourselves come to see it from God's point of view.

I

The first eleven chapters of Genesis present an unfolding story of the beginnings of human life. Chapter 1 provides a picture of the cosmic whole, man included, the main purpose of which is to teach creation and creation *by God*, and, the crucial corollary, that the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the visible heavens are not gods but creatures. The story of human beginnings proper commences in the second chapter, with life in the Garden of Eden, and proceeds temporally, giving the impression that it constitutes the primordial history of our race: first Adam and Eve; then their sons Cain and Abel; later Noah and the Deluge; afterwards Noah's sons and their descendants; and so on. But the biblical author seems to be using this temporal account to convey something atemporal and nonhistorical—indeed, something permanent and philosophical. Even more important than Genesis's version of historical beginnings is its teaching about anthropological beginnings and about moral beginnings. Thanks to the stories, we learn something about the basic nature of human beings and their primordial associations; and we learn why that nature and those associations are morally troubling. We are shown the beginnings of human life understood as the fundamental elements of human life, psychic and social—speech, questioning, the quest for autonomy, imagination, the love of your own, the arts, ambition, pride-jealousy-anger-and-shame, the love of beauty, the lust for blood and the taste for wine, and the divination of higher "powers-that-be" and the desire to control them, for example, through sacrifices—and we see quite clearly the troubles they cause us. The artful series of tales unfolds a natural anthropology, naturally evolving; and, by showing vividly the troubles that emerge when human beings act naturally, the same tales provide that most essential human beginning, the beginning of the moral education of the reader.

This moral education is accomplished by taking us vicariously through four major human stages or alternative conditions of human life: first, simple innocence (in the absence of human self-consciousness); second, life without law—that is, anarchy—based on internalized "knowledge" of good and bad; third, life under the primordial law, when man emerges from what later writers will call the state of nature; and fourth, the dispersion of peoples, each living under its own law or

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customs. Let me briefly review these early "stages" or human alternatives.

First is the condition of simple innocence in the Garden of Eden. Innocence is destroyed when man, his desires enlarged by newly used powers of mind, exercises his autonomy and takes to himself independent knowledge of good and bad; judgmentally self-conscious, he immediately discovers his nakedness, and thus his shame and wounded pride, which he artfully attempts to clothe over. This end of innocence is, literally, the expulsion into the real world, where men live according to their own lights and judgments of good and bad, without imposed law. In this second state, we encounter Eve's proud birth of Cain; Cain's sacrifice, wounded pride, jealousy, and murder of his brother; the line of Cain and the line of Seth, and their ill-fated interbreeding after Adam died in the tenth generation; and the world degenerating into riotous and lewd behavior. The flood completes the dissolution of this anarchic world.

The third state begins after the flood with Noah—righteous and simple Noah, the first man born into the world after Adam dies—when God institutes a new order based on law and covenant. An externally imposed law—to begin with, no murder—is now administered and enforced by men but with divine sanction, against a world order guaranteed to be not hostile to human aspiration by God's covenant never again to destroy the earth. This new state of primitively lawful society was to have been transmitted universally, from fathers to sons, but it was not successfully perpetuated even for one generation: Noah's drunkenness and the irreverent conduct of one of his sons made universal transmission impossible. Dispersion of peoples and election of one, under the direct leadership of God, became the next plan, featuring the nation that begins with Abraham, a people that will be called to carry God's way as a light to all the nations.

One way to speak about this series of states is to say that God keeps trying new plans after the old ones fail, in many cases making concessions to unavoidable and undesirable human weaknesses (for example, in the permission to eat meat granted with Noah). But a better way is to say that, by this means, *we* the readers learn that those other imaginable human possibilities—innocence, anarchy, universal perpetuation of law and covenant through natural lineage—"have been tried" and have failed, which is to say, *they are impossible.* We are educated to believe that the human spirit of righteousness is not strong enough to rule from within but needs outside instruction, legislation, and help. The story of the city and tower of Babel is the culmination of this sequence: it shows the impossibility of transmitting the right way through the universal, technological, secular city.

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The more immediate background for the builders of Babel is the Flood. Through this universal cataclysm, human beings encountered the full destructive force of brute nature. After the flood, God promised "Never again," but it is reasonable to surmise that the memory of the Deluge weighed at least as heavily as the hearsay report of God's promise not to repeat it—especially if one also imagines that the earth remained covered with skeletons of men and animals who died in the flood. God's first post-diluvian command to Noah to spread out and fill the earth with people might have been a terrifying prospect under the circumstances. The connection of Babel to the antecedent flood is in fact hinted at by the very last words of chapter 10 immediately preceding the story of Babel:

> These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations; and of these were the nations divided in the earth *after the flood.*

Chapter 10 is, altogether, another and gentler account of the division of mankind, answering in its way the questions, How came there to be many nations? How came there to be many tongues? The answer of chapter 10 is genealogical, beginning with the three sons of Noah, their descendants reflecting to some degree their own very different characters. Among the descendants of Ham, the irreverent son, we find one man who is, in this version, connected with Babel. Nimrod, whose name means "rebelliousness," was the one who began to be a mighty man upon the earth. He was a powerful hunter in the face of God, and for this he became famous; he was also the founder, presumably by conquest, of an empire of cities, in the plain of Shinar, and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel. By means of a large kingdom, Nimrod attempts to overcome by force the division of mankind. We should not be too quick to blame him: If what lies behind the human world is only chaos and instability, man must make his own order. Human ordering is the theme of the story of Babel.

II

"*The* whole earth *was of one language and one speech.*" The story of Babel begins with all mankind united as a single, harmonious group, or, as God says later, as "one people." Unlike the previous chapter's account of the differentiation of peoples, descending from the very different sons of Noah (who, though of one family, were not of one mind), this story begins with the entire human race, united and whole; the narrator accentuates the unity by exaggeration, identifying all mankind as "the whole earth." The project they are about to undertake is a universal human project; it is not the work only of Nimrod and the line of Ham.

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This is the first clue that Babel is not just any city, but is *the* city, the paradigmatic or universal city, representing a certain universal human aspiration.

"*Of one language.*" The unity of the human race was linguistic or logical, not (merely) genealogical. This means more than sharing uniform sounds and symbols—speaking, say, Aramaic rather than Greek; it means sharing the view of the world embedded in a language. It means sharing a common understanding of the world that any pure language implicitly contains. And, because language also bespeaks the inner world of the speakers, sharing one language means also a common inner life, with simple words accurately conveying the self-same imaginings, passions, and desires of every human being. To be of one language is to be of one mind about the most fundamental things. This is confirmed by the words that immediately follow in the story.

"*Of one speech.*" The Hebrew words are hard to translate, because there is a grammatical paradox regarding number: the noun, *devâriym,* "words," a plural, is modified by the generally singular adjective, "one," here written as a plural *'achâdiym.* A variety of interpretations have been offered: "few words," implying simple thoughts and communication; "many words but one speech," implying a single plan; or "single words," read as a synonym for a single language. But I wonder whether the strange construction with the impossible plural of "one" might be a literary hint that these people were confused about the being of one and many, and in particular about the unity of the highest One. Such confusion might, in the end, jeopardize the apparent simplicity, singleness of purpose, common understanding, and intelligibility of their thought.

"*They found a* plain *in the land of* Shinar, *and they* settled *there.*" Though mankind was told to disperse and fill the earth, the human race chose rather to settle in one place, a fertile plain in the land of Shinar (that is, in the Euphrates valley), that could accommodate and sustain them all. A fertile plain very likely suggests agriculture, not hunting and gathering; agriculture suggests settlement, rather than wandering, and also forethought, fences, and the arts. It also requires a keen dependence on heaven—on sun and rain, a matter to which we shall return.

"*And they* said, *one man to his neighbor,* 'Come, let us make *bricks.*'" The project for building the city depends on human speech. But whereas human speech has previously been used for a variety of other purposes—naming, self-naming, questioning authority, shifting blame, denying guilt, expressing fear, boasting in song, spreading shame and ridicule, and blessing and cursing—speech is here used by human beings to exhort to action and enunciate a project of *making,* for the first time in Genesis. "Come" (or "go to" *hâbâh)* means "prepare yourself,"

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"get ready to join in our mutual plan." Each man thus aroused his neighbor to the joint venture, "Let us *make*." Speech is the herald of craft.

"*Make* bricks *and* burn *them thoroughly*" (literally, "to a burning"). Far from the mountains where stones could be had, the men found no ready-made blocks for building, so they started by making their own materials, from scratch. This is the Bible's first mention of bricks. Were bricks, or permanent houses, known previously? It is doubtful: even after the flood, Noah dwelt in a tent. The very *idea* of bricks is itself an invention, a creative act of the resourceful mind. And how and from what does one make bricks? From the ground, from the moistened dust of the ground, by means of fire. Fire is universally the symbol of the arts and crafts, of technology. Through the controlled use of fire's transforming power, human beings set about to alter the world, presumably because, as it is, it is insufficient for human need. Imitating God's creation of man out of the dust of the ground, the human race begins its own project of creation by warming and transforming portions of the earth.

"*And they said, 'Come, let us build for us a* city *with a* tower *with its top [or 'head'] in the* heavens.' " Like so much of modern technology, the means precede and generate their own ends: "Now we have bricks. What can we make with them?" Bricks now in hand, the creative imagination proceeds to a new plane: it projects a city with a tower. The meaning of the city is inextricably linked with the meaning and presence of the tower; but also, the meaning of the tower is inextricably linked with the nature and meaning of the city.

Some insight is available through tales of other cities in Genesis. Before Babel, there are only two references to cities. Cain, after killing his brother Abel, is told by God that he would be a fugitive and a wanderer. But Cain settles in the land of Nod and, presumably out of fear, builds there a city, a refuge, once he has a family; and he names that city for his first born, Enoch. (The line of Cain includes the founders of the arts and crafts, implicit in civilization.) After the flood there is also a brief mention of the great city of the Assyrians, Nineveh, with its cluster of satellite cities (Genesis 10:11–12), whose wickedness Jonah will much later be sent to reprove. Later, we will learn about the supremely wicked Canaanite city of *Sidom*, destroyed by God. Whatever the city means, it seems to be linked, at least in these other cases, with violence, lewdness, and corruption. But none of those features appear tied to the city of Babel—at least not yet—which proceeds through peaceful cooperation under the rule of reason.

The city—every city—is a thoroughly human institution, with settled place and defined boundaries, whose internal plan and visible structures all manifest the presence of human reason and artfulness. The city affirms man's effort to provide for his own safety and needs, strictly on his

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own. Standing up against the given world, it affirms man's ability to control and master the given world, at least to some extent. Outliving its present inhabitants, the city stands as a memorial to the ingenuity and success of those who have gone before. But at any given moment the city is an expression of the human effort at self-sufficiency, at satisfying by human means alone all of the needs and wants of human life. Born in need, the human city, by meeting and more-than-meeting the needs of its builders, proudly celebrates the powers of human reason.

Perhaps the most celebrated passage on the origins and nature of the city is provided by Aristotle near the beginning of the *Politics*:

> The association constituted in accordance with nature for every day needs is the household. . . . The first association made out of many households for the sake of needs which are not only daily is the village. . . . And the association made out of several villages and complete is the *polis* [the city], having already, so to speak, reached the limit of full self-sufficiency; that is, it comes into being for the sake of living, but it is for the sake of living well.

This argument that roots the city in human need and defines it by self-sufficiency is supported by a second argument, which roots the city in human speech: the city, the ground of self-sufficiency, is the natural home of human beings also because it is the embodiment of, and stage for, human speech and reason. Because men have speech, they live in cities, not just in herds or swarms:

> Man is by nature a *polis*-animal . . . more than any bee or any herding animal. . . . For man alone among the animals has *logos* [thoughtful speech/reason]. . . . But *logos* is for making clear the advantageous and the harmful, and so also the just and the unjust. For this is special to men alone in relation to the other animals; having alone the awareness of good and bad, just and unjust, and the rest. And the community of these things makes a household and a *polis*.

Speaking animal, rational animal, artful animal, political animal, animal knowing good and bad, and opining about the just and the unjust—it is all one package: man becomes truly man only when he lives in a *polis*, providing for himself and ruling himself by his own light of reason, through speech and shared opinions about good and bad, just and unjust. Though the biblical author almost certainly did not read Aristotle's *Politics*, he seems to share a similar view of the meaning of the city—though not of its *goodness*. Precisely what Aristotle celebrates, Genesis views with suspicion.

And what of the tower? How is this connected with the meaning of the city? The context of the flood suggests a connection with safety: the tower is an artificial high ground providing refuge against future floods and a watchtower for the plain; it is even imaginable that it might be

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intended as a pillar to hold up heaven, lest it crack open another time. These suggestions, while plausible, do not go far enough. To this we must add what we know of the historical city of Babylon and its tower, the famous ziggurat, *Etemenanki,* in the temple of Marduk.

Marduk was the chief god of Babylon. Originally he seems to have been a god of thunderstorms, but, according to an epic poem, *Enuma elish*, he rose to preeminence after conquering the monster of primeval chaos to become "lord of the gods of heaven and earth," the supreme ruler of all nature, responsible, among other things, for the motion of the stars and for fertility and vegetation. The name of the tower, *Etemenanki,* in Sumerian means "House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth." The tower, part of the city's temple, is a human effort to link up heaven and earth. According to some accounts, the Babylonian tower was intended to pave a way for a divine entrance to the city; yet even granting such an aspiration, the project is not unambiguously pious. Unless the god or gods explicitly command such a gesture, the tower—any such conduit—must be seen as a presumptuous attempt to control or appropriate the divine, to bring the cosmic origins down into one's own midst, to encompass the divine within one's own constructions. What appears at first glance as submission is in fact, at least partly, an expression of pride.

But there is probably more to the Babylonian tower than its name and its connection with Marduk. The ziggurats of Babylon had more straightforward, even rational, interests in heaven—heaven understood, quite literally, as the place of the sun, moon, and stars, and as the source of rain. Babylon was the place where human beings first began to study the stars and to plot and measure their courses. The towers would, almost certainly, have been the favored sites for astronomical observation—not for the restful and disinterested contemplation of the Greek philosophers, but for an apprehensive yet patient scrutiny and measurement of the motions of the heavenly bodies, in the service of calculation, prediction, and control—and not least, for rain. The priests ruled the city on the basis of their knowledge—and divination—regarding heaven. The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth thus sought to link the city with the cosmos, and to bring the city into line with the heavenly powers-that-be, or—perhaps conversely—to bring the powers-that-be into line with the goals of the city.

Not every human city has a ziggurat. But every human city orients itself on the basis of some intuition about the cosmic whole. Without some instruction to the contrary, human beings will eventually be inclined to look up to nature and, especially, to heaven, for heaven is the home of those visible powers that matter so much to the life of the city, especially as the city rests on agriculture.

"*And let us* make *for us a* name, lest we be scattered *abroad upon the*

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face of the whole earth." The city is a mixture of pride and fear. Its origins, quite likely, are in fear. This immediately post-diluvian population has better reason than most to know and fear nature's wildness and inhospitality and to shrink from standing unarmed and dispersed before the powers that be. Having (at best) hearsay knowledge of God's promise to Noah ("No more floods," no total destruction), these men are inclined rather to trust to self-help for protection against the state of nature and the wide open spaces. They find strength in numbers and unification, and in their ability cooperatively to craft a home in the midst of an indifferent—not to say hostile—world.

But the beginnings in fear gradually give rise to pride. Human craft is its foundation. Beginning low and working from the ground up, men make bricks from the dust of the earth by the transforming power of fire. Lowly materials in hand, their ambition soars, as they conceive next to build a city and a tower, with its top in heaven. The city and tower express the human conquest of necessity, human self-sufficiency, and independence. Above all, the sky-scraping tower—whatever its explicit purpose—stands proudly as a monumental achievement of proud builders, to serve their everlasting glory. The anticipatory vaunt of the builders—"Let us *make* us a *name*"—shows the towering pride, though the fear of dispersion ("lest we be scattered abroad") has not been altogether extinguished.

What is this wish "to *make* us a *name*"? The verb "to make," *'âsâh,* has previously been used only by God, either to announce His own makings or to command Noah's building of the ark, or, once, by the narrator to report God's making of coats of skins. The word *name,* hitherto used in relation to particular names, acquires here a new sense for the first time in Genesis. Adam had named the animals, named himself and the woman as woman and man *('îyshâh* and *'îysh),* and later renamed the woman, "Eve," honoring her powers as mother of all life. People give and receive names that are significant (Noah, for example, the first person born after the death of Adam, gets a name meaning both "comfort" and "lament"). Fame and renown are sought, and some men even boast of their deeds (for example, Lamech, who is poet for his own heroism). But the aspiration to *make* a name goes beyond the desires to *give* oneself a name or to *gain* a name—that is, fame and glory for great success.

To *make* a name for oneself is, most radically, to "make that which requires a name." To make a new name for oneself is to remake the meaning of one's life so that it deserves a new name. To change the meaning of human being is to remake the content and character of human life. The city, fully understood, achieves precisely that. Through technology, through division of labor, through new modes of interdependence and rule, and through laws, customs, and mores, the city

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radically transforms its inhabitants. At once makers and made, the founders of Babel aspire to nothing less than self-*re*-creation—through the arts and crafts, customs and mores of their city. The children of man (Adam) remake themselves and, thus, their name, in every respect taking the place of God.

"*But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man* [or "children of Adam," *benêy ha'âdâm*] *were building.*" At its midpoint, the story of Babel shifts from the human point of view to God's; but in making the shift, the narrator identifies the builders of the city as "the children of Adam." This could be a simple euphemism for human beings: sons of man, playing at being God. But it also connects the protagonists of this last pre-Abrahamic story with their oldest ancestor, the first, or paradigmatic, man, Adam, whose name is, in fact, not a proper name at all but rather the generic name for the entire species. The term "children of Adam" assimilates the meaning of the project of Babel to the first "project" of the first man, the appropriation of autonomous knowledge of good and bad. Here, as in the Garden of Eden, men act in disobedience to distinct commands, Adam to the specific prohibition about the tree of knowledge, the builders of the tower to the post-diluvian command to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth. The comparison is apt, for in both cases the very deed means disobedience: in Adam's individual case, autonomy—choosing for yourself—is the opposite of obedience; in the builders' case, independent self-sufficiency—making yourself—is the opposite of obedient dependence, in relation to God or anything else. The road from Adam to the builders of the city is straight and true. As the end of the Garden of Eden story itself makes clear, the so-called "fall of man" is in fact a bittersweet rise into civilization. God's announced future for our race—the so-called sentence pronounced in Genesis 3:14–24—embraces separation from the animals, self-consciousness, division of labor, rule and obedience, agriculture and bread, clothing and the arts, concern with good and bad, and the longing for immortality and lost innocence—in a word, civilization.

Civilization suffers, perhaps, when compared with the innocence and contentment of Eden; but when men come face to face with hostile nature or hostile men in a state of nature, the city appears as a remedy and the universal city a dream of deliverance, peace, and prosperity. In Babel, the universal city, with its own uniform language, beliefs, truths, customs, and laws, the dream of the city holds full sway in the hearts and minds of its inhabitants. Protected by its walls, warmed and comforted in its habitats, and ruled by its teachings, the children of Adam, now men of the city, neither know nor seek to know anything beyond. Contentment reigns, or so it does seem.

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III

Can such a project succeed? Can such a city, if successfully founded, long endure? There is some reason to be doubtful. For one thing, the goal of reaching heaven with the tower is impossible; that the Lord had to "come down" to see what the men had done is, in part, a wry comment on the gap between their aspiration and their deed. For another, the materials used by the men were poor substitutes—bricks for stones, slime for mortar—and were unlikely to secure the desired permanence. More fundamentally, the unity of mind that inspired the project of the city could hardly be expected to survive the division of labor that brought the city into being: the oneness of human life would surely be replaced by the many ways of life, as masons and carpenters and farmers and metalworkers acquire different and competing interests. Yet God's single comment would seem to imply that the project would, or at least could, succeed as conceived—that is, that the city was feasible. Its failings, if any, were intellectual or moral or spiritual, not practical. They would be the failings of success.

What might these failings be? The first and most obvious is the matter of piety. What do the men revere? To what do they look up? At first they may look up, quite literally, to heaven, to the "powers that be"—the sun, moon, and stars. But implicit in the attempt to know, exploit, and control these powers—through calculation, divination, and perhaps sacrifices—is their belief in their own superiority. The aspiration to reach heaven is in fact a desire to bring heaven into town, either to control it or, more radically, to efface altogether the distinction between the human and the natural or divine. In the end, the men will revere nothing and will look up to nothing not of their own making, to nothing beyond or outside of themselves, in part because they will see no eternal horizon. Content with and confined within "the cave," they will forget about the truly enduring realm beyond.

This charge against the city is not peculiarly biblical, as the allusion to the Platonic allegory of the cave reminds us. In comparing our lives to those of men enchained in caves, Socrates implies that it is the Promethean gift of fire and the enchantment of the arts that hold men unwittingly enslaved, blind to the world beyond the city. Mistaking their crafted world for the whole, men live as cave dwellers, ignorant of their true standing in the world and their absolute dependence on powers not of their making and beyond their control.

Second among their failings is that the men refuse to look not only "up" but down. They seem willfully to forget and deny their own mortality. Unlike Cain, who named his city for his son, the men of Babel want a name for themselves here and now, and give no thought for their offspring. Rational, but proudly unreasonable, these self-made makers

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forget their animality and the need for procreation. Mind and craft, they implicitly believe, can thoroughly triumph over necessity and mortality.

Third are several failings regarding the crucial matter of standards. In their act of total self-creation, there could be no separate and independent (non-man-made) standard to guide the self-making or by means of which to judge it good. The men, unlike God in His creation, will be unable to see that all that they had done is good. They could, of course, see if the building as built conformed to their own blueprint, but they could not judge its goodness in any other sense.

Even more important, there could be no moral and political standards sufficient for governing civic life and for guiding the proper use of power and technique. Power and technique are ethically neutral: they can be used both justly and unjustly. The omnicompetent city lacking in justice is a menace, both to itself and to the world. Even assuming that the inhabitants wish to be just, where will the builders of Babel find any knowledge of justice or, indeed, of any moral or political principle or standard?

Perhaps they will look up to the heavens. But looking to the heavens for moral guidance cannot succeed; the heavens may, as the Psalmist says, reveal the glory of God, but they are absolutely mute on the subjects of righteousness and judgment. One can deduce absolutely nothing moral even from the fullest understanding of astronomy and cosmology. Not even the basic prohibitions against cannibalism, incest, murder, and adultery—constitutive for all decent human communities—can be supported by or deduced from the natural world. (Perhaps this is why the Bible, devoted to instruction in righteousness, begins by denying the divinity of everything we see around us, and, especially, of the heavens.) From the point of view of righteousness—indeed, for all ethical and political purposes—cosmic gods are about as useful as no gods at all.

The intelligentsia of Babel know perfectly well the moral silence of the cosmic gods, but they are not without resources. The builders can build whatever is wanted. They will, accordingly, construct their own standards of right and good; but by this device they ultimately degrade the people they mean to serve. For if right and good are themselves human creations, if they have no independent meaning, justice loses all claim upon the soul. The natural longings for the right, the noble, or the good that might arise in human beings could only be treated with contempt: the soul would be fed instead with artificial and arbitrary substitutes, cast forth by the human "makers of values." And unlike the shadows or images cast by the poets in Plato's cave, these artifacts of "the just" or "the noble" could bear no image relation to some genuine original toward which they point.

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Fourth among the failings is that all speech loses its power to reveal the world. Speech can still be expressive of human intention and useful in practical affairs, as stipulated meanings, commonly agreed to, are communicated from one person to the next. One can still say, "Come, let us build," and "Pass the hammer." But speech can no longer be used for inquiry, for genuine thought, for seeking after what is. When the units of intelligibility conveyed in speech have no independent being, when words have no power to reveal the things that truly are, then speech becomes only self-referential, and, finally, unintelligible. Even the name one makes for oneself means nothing.

Finally, and perhaps the worst failing of all, there is no possibility in such a city of discovering all of the other failings. The much-prized fact of unity, embodied especially in a unique but created truth, believed by all, precludes the possibility of discovering that one might be in error. The one uncontested way does not even admit of the distinction between truth and error. Self-examination, no less than self-criticism, would be impossible; there could be no Socrates who knew that he did not know. With everyone given over to the one common way, there would be mass identity and mass consciousness but no private identity or true self-consciousness; there would be shoulder-to-shoulder but no real face-to-face. Unity and homogeneity in self-creation is compatible with material prosperity, but it is a prescription for mindless alienation, from the world, from one's fellows, and from one's true self.

The project for mastery and unity begins by presupposing a partial estrangement of human beings from the world, which it hopes to overcome. Yet, in the end, the project for mastery—that is, if successful—means the complete and permanent estrangement from what is real. Ironically, the proposed remedy makes the disease total and totally incurable. The self-sufficient and independent city of man means full estrangement and spiritual death for all its inhabitants.

One must thus reconsider the earlier judgment that the project of the builders could in fact succeed as planned. Over the long haul, could mutual understanding survive or cooperation flourish in the presence of spiritual, moral, and intellectual decay? Would not the meaninglessness of speech eventually foster, all by itself, the confusion that is Babel? Does God intervene only to push matters quickly to their logical conclusion, to make manifest, all at once, what was implicitly fatal and fated in the project from the start?

IV

People are often best chastened and instructed by showing them vividly the previously hidden meaning of what they thought they wanted (for example, Midas's wish for the golden touch, or Achilles'

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wish for glory). In the Babel story, God's intervention would serve vividly to indicate the chaos, confusion, and alienation that are the inevitable consequences—or, better, the intrinsic meaning—of any all-too-human, prideful attempt at self-creation. This is, admittedly, an unconventional way of reading the Bible, and the suggestion that God is just a workman who hastens what is necessary does not square neatly with the text. For if failure were both inevitable and desirable, why did not God just bide His time and allow the moral lesson to teach itself? And why does He speak as if the venture might succeed?

In fact, it is only God's intervention that could *prove* that failure was *inevitable*, and permanently so. Spontaneous failure, happening later in the ordinary course of things, might be perceived as an accident, avoidable by another, and better, attempt. When we remember that the story is told mainly for the edification of its readers, we who are ever-tempted by the universal city feel the power of hearing God's judgment and seeing His will behind its actual demise. We are moved to see that the highest principle of being cannot support—that is, brings down—any human project that knows it not.

God's "punishment" fits the "crime." It opposes precisely each of the failings of the city by thwarting the plan to build it. The "punishment" not only "fits" the "crime"; it is also a gift to treat and rehabilitate the "criminal." Failure is offered as cure.

Confusion of speech is the cornerstone of God's intervention. Misunderstanding and non-understanding make further cooperation on the project impossible, and the men leave off building the city. Dispersion, following upon the confounding of speech, leads to the emergence of separate nations, with separate tongues and separate ways, with the near-certain prospect of difference, opposition, and the danger of war. It is easy to see how linguistic and cultural multiplicity, contention, and the threat of destruction through war "fit," as remedies of opposition, the aspirations to unity, harmony, and prideful self-sufficiency on which the city is built. But they also serve to remedy the failings of idolatry, the denial of mortality, the lack of standards, the divorce of speech from being, the lack of self-examination, and, in sum, the full estrangement of man. In every case, it is *negativity* that fits the punishment to the crime: failure or opposition is the heart of the remedy, or at least provides its beginnings.

The emergence of multiple nations, with their divergent customs and competing interests, challenges the view of human self-sufficiency. Each nation, by its very existence, testifies against the godlike status of every other; the rivalries that spring up are, in part, both the result and the cause of the affronts to national self-esteem that such otherness necessarily implies. The prospect of war and, even more, its actual horrors

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prevent forgetfulness of mortality, vulnerability, and insufficiency. Such times of crisis are often times that open men most to think about the eternal and the divine.

Awareness of the multiplicity of human ways is also the necessary precondition for the active search for the better or best way. Discovering the partiality of one's own truths and standards invites the active search for truths and standards beyond one's making. Opposition is the key to the discovery of the distinction between error and truth, appearance and reality, convention and nature—between that which is said to be or which appears to be and that which truly is, independent of all saying or seeming. And, even in relations between nations, the awareness of misunderstanding is the possible beginning of the search for genuine understanding, based upon recognizing the similar aspirations of the other; such an understanding is admittedly hard to attain (in the face of mistrust and genuine conflicts of interest), but it would be an understanding much deeper than the factitious homogeneity and agreement created out of nothing. In all of these cases, failure and want—and their recognition as failure and want—are the seeds of the human aspiration to be and do better. The self-content have no aspirations and longings; the self-content are closed to the high.

After man was created and set into the Garden of Eden, God observes that it is not good for the man to be alone. Though it is common and appropriate to think that "alone" means "lonely" or "in need of assistance"—that is, that it is a badge of weakness—"alone" could also mean "self-sufficient" or "independent," a sign of apparent strength. Why might a philanthropic God find fault with such apparent human strength? Perhaps because the perfect man, because he was alone, could not know himself to be perfect, indeed, could not know himself at all. Or, more likely, perhaps the original independent man, though he dwelt in the Lord's garden, had no real awareness of the presence of God. The coming of the woman first awakens man's self-awareness, and the result of their transgression not only heightens their moral self-consciousness but brings them to their first awareness of God. Only after they discover their own insufficiency and dependence, implicit in their nakedness, do they for the first time "hear the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden." Only in discovering the distance between ourselves and the Eternal, between ourselves and the truly self-sufficient, can human beings orient themselves toward that which is genuinely highest. God's dispersion of the nations is the political analog to the creation of woman: instituting otherness and opposition, it is the necessary condition for national self-awareness and the possibility of a politics that will hear and hearken to the voice of what is eternal, true, and good.

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V

The story of Babel ends abruptly with the scattering of peoples across the face of the earth. The next story, the call of Abraham, begins even more abruptly:

> And the Lord said unto Abram: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. So Abram went. . . ." (Genesis 12:1–4)

Why does God choose Abram? Why does Abram go? The text is utterly silent on these matters, perhaps in order not to distract us from the overwhelming facts that God did choose him and that Abram, without a word, got up and went.

But what if the lessons of Babel have something to do with the election of Abram? Could the text, by juxtaposing the two stories, be suggesting that an understanding of the beginning of Abram is linked to an understanding of Babel? Is there a *logical* and *moral* connection, not necessarily a historical or empirical one? We are encouraged to consider this possibility because of the literary structure of the text itself. Between Babel and the call of Abram, Genesis gives the single line of descent of the ten generations leading from Shem to Abram, tying the tale of dispersion to the tale of election. With the lesson of Babel behind him, the reader is ready to hear the call of Abram. Is it also possible that, with Babel behind him, someone in the line from Shem to Abram was ready to hear the call of God?

The most obvious negative connection between Babel and the new way has already been made: the universal city of self-made men will not be a pious, moderate, just, thoughtful, or dignified home for human life, notwithstanding its ability to improve man's material conditions through technology. To have discovered the moral and political insufficiency of human artfulness opens one to the possibility of something beyond artifice, to something real and truly satisfying. Again, this is not a peculiarly biblical point but a human one. According to Plato's *Republic,* the discovery that one's life is in the grip of shadows cast by the artifacts of poets and other opinion-makers liberates the prisoners in Socrates' cave to discover and pursue a world of incredible splendor beyond the cave. But since Abram is not Socrates and biblical fear of the Lord is not philosophy, perhaps there are some specific details in the generations of Shem that help us understand the special path that Abram took, against the background of the special cave that was Babel.

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The name of the head of the line, "Shem," means "name," the same as the word used in the Babel story, "to make us a name." Shem has gained a name for himself, not by pursuing it proudly but rather for his leadership in the pious covering of his father Noah's nakedness. The arch-ancestor of Abram is pious, refusing to look directly upon his natural origins; he looked away from nature in the direction of the as-yet unpromulgated law to honor father and mother. Such a one is fit for the familial task of transmission. The inviolability, not to say sanctity, of family life will be crucial to the new way.

But the lineage of Abram becomes truly interesting with Terah, Abram's father. Terah, mysteriously and on his own, leaves his family home in Ur of the Chaldees and sets forth, with Abram, Lot, and Sarai, Abram's wife, to go to the land of Canaan. Chaldees is a biblical synonym for Babylonians; Ur, though not Babylon itself, was a Babylonian city, historically a center of moon-god worship, as was Haran, the city on the way to Canaan where Terah stopped. Abram will continue and complete the migration of his father, from Babylonia to Canaan, but in obedience to God's command. Like his father, Abram, too, is a refugee from Babylonia, from the land of the worship of the heavens and the heavenly bodies. He also, therefore, becomes a man without a home, without a city, without roots, and without the gods of his place of origins. Abram is the rootless, homeless, godless son of a wanderer (or radical), one who has grown out of, but who has outgrown and rejected, the Babylonian ways and gods. Two more things we know about Abram: he is married to a beautiful woman, Sarai, and he is still childless at age seventy-five when God calls, for Sarai is barren.

In his circumstances, Abram is as far as possible from the self-satisfied and secure condition of the builders of Babel: he has no gods; he has no city; he has no children; he has no settled ways; he is discontent, yet he is not despairing: he is capable of loving a beautiful woman even though she is barren. Almost certainly a man of longing, he longs for roots, land, home, settled ways, children, for something great, and for the divine. About the divine, perhaps he has learned something important—albeit negatively—as a result of his experience of the Babylonian way: he has seen through the worship of heaven.

How this might have happened is, of course, pure speculation. But is it not conceivable that, on the basis of his *own* study of the stars, Abram intuited that the visible stars could not themselves be gods, precisely because, though they are many, they move in such an ordered whole? Could Abram have intuited that there must be an invisible, single intelligent source behind the visible, many, but silent heavenly bodies, moving dumbly yet in intelligible ways? Is this perhaps what is behind

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the rabbinic legends that Abram smashed his father's idols, having become persuaded of monotheism on *philosophical* grounds, even before God spoke to him directly? Could Abram have figured out that the truth cannot be one city with many gods, but many nations in search of the one God?

God calls Abram with a command and a promise. The promise answers Abram's longing for land, seed, and a great name. (God does not condemn ambition for fame but will grant it only for pious service.) Abram goes not because he knows exactly who it is that is calling him—only later does God identify himself to Abram and then only partially as almighty God *('êl shadday)*, in chapter 17; Abram goes not only because he wants the promise but also because he has at least two reasons to believe that the speaker just might be a god indeed and one able to deliver. First of all, this speaker in fact speaks—that is, this invisible being is itself clearly intelligent. Second, the voice addresses him not only personally but knowingly and with concern: marvelously, from Abram's point of view, the speaker has seen directly into Abram's heart, for the promises that are made respond to Abram's deepest longings. Nothing revered in Babylon could speak or know what men want. Abram completes the rejection of Babel and heads off to found God's new way.

VI

Did the failure of Babel produce the cure? Has the new way succeeded? The walk that Abram took led ultimately to biblical religion, which, by anyone's account, is a major source and strength of Western civilization. Yet, standing where we stand, late in the twentieth century, it is far from clear that the proliferation of opposing nations is a boon to the race. Mankind as a whole is not obviously more reverent, just, and thoughtful. And internally, the West often seems tired; we appear to have lost our striving for what is highest. God has not spoken to us in a long time.

The causes of our malaise are numerous and complicated, but one of them is too frequently overlooked: the project of Babel has been making a comeback. Ever since the beginning of the seventeenth century, when men like Bacon and Descartes called mankind to the conquest of nature for the relief of man's estate, the cosmopolitan dream of the city of man has guided many of the best minds and hearts throughout the world. Science and technology are again on the make, defying political boundaries en route to a projected Human Empire over nature. God, it seems, forgot about the possibility that a new universal language could emerge, the language of *symbolic mathematics*, and its offspring, mathematical physics. It is algebra that all men understand without disagreement. It is

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Cartesian analytic geometry that enables the mind mentally to homogenize the entire world, to turn it into stuff for our manipulations. It is the language of Cartesian mathematics and method that have brought Babel back from oblivion. Whether we think of the heavenly city of the philosophes, or the post-historical age toward which Marxism points, or, more concretely, the imposing building of the United Nations that stands today in America's first city—we see everywhere evidence of the revived Babylonian vision.

What are we now to think? Can a new Babel succeed? And can it escape—has it escaped?—the failings of success of its ancient prototype? What, for example, will it revere? Will its makers and its beneficiaries be hospitable to procreation and child rearing? Can it find genuine principles of justice and other non-artificial standards for human conduct? Will it be conducive to inquiry and a home for serious thought? Will it be self-critical? Can it really overcome our estrangement, alienation, and despair? Anyone who reads the newspapers has grave reasons for doubt. The city is back, and so, too, is Sidom, babbling and dissipating away. Perhaps we ought to see the dream of Babel today, once again, from God's point of view.

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Hostages to Fortune

A Memoir

JOHN W. ALDRIDGE

FOR MUCH OF MY LIFE I have felt badgered and victimized by the talk of older people. My father was a compulsive talker, and it may be that from an early age I saw all older people in his garrulous image. He was one of those men who talk for the same reason that small boys whistle in the dark: because they are frightened, not just of the dark, but of the vast echoing silences within themselves. My father filled his particular silences with speech. He talked to make himself real, and I am sure that he had no sense of identity whatever until he was able to spin out a fiction of words that would locate him in a fanciful past among people and events of cosmic size and significance. When I think, for example, of his lifelong obsession with the Civil War, in which his own father was supposed to have fought, or at least served, on the Confederate side, I remember the distinct impression I had as a child that it was he himself who had fought in it, he who had led the charge at Vicksburg or crawled under a hail of rocks up the naked slopes of Lookout Mountain. And I must have got that impression because he gave it to me and probably, at least at the moment of telling, shared it himself.

I don't mean to say that my father ever deliberately or consciously lied. He was an honorable man who took rather stiff Southern pride in always keeping his word and dealing fairly with people, and his one piece of advice to me, which he repeated over and over again, was always tell the truth, John, and you will come out right in the end. I am sure he believed this and thought he lived by it throughout his life. I remember also that on the day of his funeral his old friends who were gathered at the graveside, bald, white-haired, wet-eyed, while the American Legion bugler blew the final notes of "Taps," spoke to me of what a fine man he was, and I saw in their faces that they sincerely felt he was. Yet the plain fact is that a very great deal of my father's talk was

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sheer fabrication. Regardless of what he consciously believed, he could never really tell the truth about anything. He was always compelled to revise it into the dramatic or spectacular thing it had to become if it was to give him the sense of however vicarious glory he had to have.

He lied, I see now, quite simply and instinctively to justify his life, because he could not bear to face the banality, the compromises, above all, the peculiar errant aimlessness of all the years he had spent waiting for some kind of grandiose main chance to overtake him and commend his soul to greatness. Essentially, I suppose, my father was a failure with a bardic gift, a born teller of tales who used the past as a repository for his frustrated dreams, who remade history because he could not make it, and who, like all such people, came to believe, without knowing that he believed, that the successful life was finally an act of imagination, a matter of imposing a wishful sublimity upon the crass realities of everyday existence. I have often wondered what would have happened if he had ever had his main chance for greatness. I am almost certain he would have muffed it. He would always have hesitated a second too long after the recruit dropped the live grenade or tripped on a stone while running to head off the charging bull or fired bravely but inaccurately at the presidential assassin—because he was never prepared to deal with the contingencies of the fateful present. The present became real to him only to the extent that he could make it past, only as he could re-create it through the fabrication of his interminable talk.

Lately I have come to understand all this. I have arrived at a point where I can sympathize with my father and even to some extent forgive him. We are all fallen, a wise man once said, and one needs time to learn the truth of this by falling. But when I was younger and supposed that only the fainthearted fall, I felt only contempt for the liberties my father took with the truth, and because of him and because he horrified as well as bored me with his talk, I never understood the impulse of most people to unburden themselves to others. Also, perhaps for the same reason, I early developed an almost pathological fastidiousness about words, a passion to preserve them pristine and inviolate as though they had a chastity and I was their protector, a determination to use them only with the greatest respect and caution. My father was absolutely devoid of the power of verbal self-criticism. Words to him were solely instruments for the glamorization of history, the ornamentation of myths. By the time I was twelve or thirteen, I had made up my mind that in this respect at least I would never be my father's son. By then I had grown out from under his spell and rejected him utterly, even to the point of making a religion of his one piece of advice so that I could atone for his failure to live up to it. I began to insist that words were meant to describe things as they are and that I would tell the truth with them or die. As time went

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on, I found this to be a highly commendable but altogether unworkable code of conduct. More often than not, one told the truth *and* died, or at the very least, suffered severely. But at that age I saw no other way I could ever hope to live down the lies told by my father.

Yet if I am going to be fair, I have to admit that my father was not the only person responsible for my obsession with the truth-telling imperatives of language. He was undoubtedly the worst and, since he was my father, the most influential offender, but there were others. In fact, all through my childhood and adolescence I was surrounded by prodigious talkers and verbal self-deceivers whose interest in unburdening themselves was second only to their talent for making the trivia of their lives seem portentous through the sheer extravagant monotony of their talk. I remember that some of these people obsessed me to the point where they took on ogreish shapes in my mind, and I lived at moments in a kind of nightmare in which they came at me madly wielding words like bludgeons and beat me with them until I lost all sense of their meaning and became so anesthetized that for years I was scarcely able to understand anything that anyone said to me. There was a time when I could not be in the same room with a person past fifty without almost immediately becoming the victim of his battering compulsion to deliver up his soul in speech. After a while I became convinced that all such people were insane, and I learned to treat them as if they were insane. I used to sit there wearing a face of the most idiotic obsequiousness, while they chattered on and on and on about themselves and their ailments and their childhoods and their relatives and their husbands and wives and how many quarts the milkman had delivered that morning—all the housekeeping bric-a-brac of their desperate passage through time and space. I knew of course that they were not really talking to me, that if I existed at all for them it was as some kind of medium or telephone connection through which they were hoping to make their peace with God or fate or death or whatever cosmic agency the desperate appeal to in their garrulity. Or perhaps, like my father, they were simply telling themselves a story, trying to make whatever had happened to them coherent and therefore acceptable and bearable, trying to give their lives such meaning as they could before the light of hope faded out and they all went down into the speechless dark. But whatever they were trying to do, they were doing it at my expense, and I sank into a paralysis of boredom, which it has taken me half my life to overcome.

So often in childhood I was held captive at the dinner table, where I was forced to stay until I had cleaned my plate, by the heavy dull weight of reminiscence that passed back and forth like loaded trays among the feeding adults. It was as excessive and unappetizing as the lumpy mashed potatoes I was never able to eat and the rich runny desserts, and

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after a while I no longer knew whether it was the food I gagged on or the words. My elders talked steadily all through dinner and around the table afterwards, while the sweat formed on the sides of their noses and on the iced tea pitcher, my fat aunts heaving and sighing and fanning themselves, the oil lamps ever so slightly smoking, and the night sky over those vacant plains flickered with heat lightning and rolled up great black clouds of a thunderstorm. I remember those times as always a Sunday in the summer, hot and threatening, always on some uncle's or cousin's farm in a detestable country of grain elevators, cornfields, tornadoes, and heavy food, the odor of cow manure in stuffy parlors, the buzz of flies, the talk of relatives all packed together around the dining room table, the air oppressive with family and the presence of the past. My Uncle Carl, pushing his chair back, picking his teeth, then saying in his flat prairie accent, "Well now, do you remember the Jorgensen girl—Mabel, I think it was—who ran off with the fella from Chicago," or "I remember back in nineteen-nine before they pulled down the old Union Depot," and it would begin, I sullenly chewing my cold potatoes, the words running on and on, while the night rumbled with thunder and everyone tried to say how it once had been, some slight trivial moment retrieved from the swallowing dark.

For a great many years—until, in fact, I was a grown man, back from the war, married, and settled down—I lacked the nerve to take my place in the great company of reminiscers, confiders, and self-unburdeners whose talk so oppressed me as a child. I had become entrenched in the passive habits of a listener—or let us say that I early learned to hide behind a pretense of listening—so that I automatically deferred to anyone showing symptoms of aggressiveness, whether it took the form of a demand that I listen or let them go first through the door or take the cab I had just flagged down. Their need, I told myself, was obviously greater than mine, and if it meant all that much to them, who was I to stand in their way? Besides, I had other resources, by which of course I meant superior resources. And the most valuable one, as well, apparently, as the rarest, was the ability to keep my mouth shut.

But I ultimately discovered that the need to say how it was is central to the human condition, perhaps the first necessity of human life. Not very long ago something happened to me that made me understand a little better what it must have been like for those talkers around the dinner tables of my childhood, how hard it is but how necessary to take up the burden of one's connection with the past and one's relation to the growth and decay of families, one's place in history, one's individual bout with time. Conditions now are more formidable and frightening than they were when I was a child. The temptations to run out on history, to retreat into a protective silence, are overwhelming, and I have done

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my share of retreating and running out. But a moment can come when you are forced to stop running, when something takes you right back to that dinner table and sits you down and tells you to wait until your elders have finished eating and are through talking, something, in fact, that commands you to listen and learn and finally understand. It has happened, at least for me, that there has been no avoiding that moment. I have had to go back and listen and learn and at last begin myself to talk.

II

I suppose that all human growth is a process of trying to understand what in some buried part of ourselves we already know, and for me the process began as an effort to understand my father's obsession with the past and with our family history. I realize of course that my father was by no means alone in this. In fact, there is a compulsive genealogical strain in all the Aldridges, and it seems that every family bearing our name has at least one member who devotes his spare time to tracing ancestors and carrying on eternally hopeful correspondences with other bearers of the name. Still, my father was inordinately obsessed. Genealogy consumed his life, and even on the day of his death, it was all he had on his mind.

I have often wondered whether this passion of ours—or, in my father's case, this madness—might have something to do with the fact that the family emigrated to this country so far back in the earliest colonial days that our lines of connection with the past have become overextended, and we constantly need to reassure ourselves that we have some traceable relationship with a stable order of life. Certainly, there may be truth in the idea that my father, in a rare moment of self-awareness, once put forward: that the family never quite recovered from the loss of its English roots, never really felt at home in the mountains of Tennessee where, after almost a century of wandering, our branch finally settled, or out in the plains of the Middle West, where remote cousins and granduncles, moving west with the first wagon trains, stopped off to barter land from the Indians and became farmers and bred swarms of children who in turn drifted fretfully here and there across the continent seeking their salvation in gold rushes, land swindles, and oil wells. When the frontier closed, and with it the promise of an indefinitely expanding future, some of us turned in desperation to the past and began excavating for our sources there.

All this sounds rather grandiose, I know, and it may be nothing more than another illustration of my father's remarkable talent for inventing the very myths in which he most passionately believed. Yet there is one fact he could not possibly have invented, and I have always found it both interesting and nicely ironical. However rootless the family may have

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been and however much time and energy we may have spent trying to cure ourselves of the condition, biology has built into us a link with the past that is far more tangible and dependable than any family history.

It so happens that there is a very distinctive Aldridge face, a certain arrangement and cast of features, that has given us the clearly recognizable look of all belonging to the same tribe or of descending from a single all-powerful ancestor. One finds it in all the old family albums, and over the generations it has come to be most pronounced in the male line. The Aldridge eyes are the feature most people notice first. Whether they look out of smooth boy faces or over the heavy full beards of my Tennessee forebears, they are all exactly the same—severe, proud, very probably pale blue like mine—and they all have that frightening quality of seeming to stare right through you, as if you and the rest of the human race were hiding something contemptible that they were determined to expose. The face as a whole is long and angular with deep hollows in the cheeks. The forehead is high, and the hair as a rule recedes early, leaving an island of forelock running back to an eventually naked crown. The nose is thin and distinguished, with a high bridge and nostrils that flare and are capable of registering extremely minute gradations of distaste. All in all, it is an English aristocrat's face, and the remarkable thing is that it has not changed in appearance since my namesake, the original John Aldridge, our first ancestor of whom a likeness exists, came to this country almost three hundred years ago. There is a small watercolor portrait of him in the Historical Society collection at Charlottesville, and my father in middle age looked enough like him to be his brother rather than his many times great-grandson. I in turn look so much like my father that on the two occasions when I have gone back to the town where he was born, old people have stopped me on the street and called me by his name, forgetting that, if I were he, I would be almost eighty years old.

But the real point about the Aldridge face—and I arrived at this only recently, after a good deal of careful poring over old photographs—is that it is living proof of my father's hypothesis: it is a face of the most complete and abject isolation. Perhaps because it belongs so purely to the past, it seems utterly irrelevant to the circumstances of life of everyone who has inherited it. At various times it has been the face of many different kinds of men—farmers, schoolteachers, grocers, mule traders, squirrel hunters, judges, even a bank robber or two. Yet it appears equally unsuited to all of them, and each wears it as though he were wearing a mask he had bought for a costume ball. For hundreds of years it has looked out on a world to which its every lineament is strange, in which finally it has had no natural business being—no more business, in fact, than a costume ball in the wilderness where most of those men lived. And I, who have carried it with some pride into the present, have

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had plenty of opportunity to discover that it still connects with nothing it looks upon, that if anything it is more wholly in exile at this present moment than it could possibly have been before.

In view of all this, there would be special comfort in the realization that the Aldridges could, at some distant time in the past, claim aristocratic connections to go with and justify the Aldridge face. If it has been homeless amid the raw commonplaces of America, then it ought by rights to have once belonged to some genteel older order of refinement and privilege. But although the various family genealogists—and in particular my father—have spent years writing letters and blowing the dust off ancient courthouse records, no one, so far as I know, has ever turned up a single distinguished ancestor or even a distinguished scandal. Apparently, we have always been, at least as far back as written records go, pretty much what we later became in America—farmers, storekeepers, perhaps at best small landowners and yeomen before the great migration of the 1660s. Yet it is a fact that I must admit gives even me a certain pleasure that the name does appear in the Domesday Book among those recorded as owning English land at the time of William the Conqueror. There is even a town called Aldridge in central England, and once after the war I went there and got slightly drunk at the pub and had my picture taken standing in front of the post office just beneath the sign announcing Aldridge in large capital letters. I asked at the town clerk's office about the origin of the name and discovered that a cousin of mine had inquired before me and had been politely, but I suspect somewhat contemptuously, told that no connection had been established between the first inhabitants of the town and any existing Aldridges. There was, to be sure, an ancient local church and in it the tomb of a knight whose name might have been the Norman or perhaps Scandinavian form of ours. But it was, as the clerk said, impossible to establish.

The phrase stays in my mind because it finally came to seem the perfect description of our whole genealogical effort. The exact truth of the Aldridge past was, as it turned out, impossible to establish, although a good many people held to the illusion that it was, and even on the day my father died, the last time I saw him, he could talk of nothing else. By then I should have known better, but when the doctor told me he was dying and might not live through the night, I had the notion that now, if we were ever going to, my father and I would talk to each other. For as long as I could remember, we had never quite managed to do this. It was always he who did the talking and I who listened, until, as always happened, my boredom reached a point where I simply ceased to hear what he was saying. But on this last day I hoped—and I was surprised to realize how desperately I hoped—that things would be different, and that we could get down to some of the realities that I supposed must exist

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between any father and his son. I thought he might have awareness enough of his condition to want to say something about what it had been like to live on this earth for seventy-five years, and how it felt to be a father and have me for a son. I suppose I expected some sort of testimonial from him or even some sentimentality accompanied perhaps by a few tears. Instead, all my father wanted to talk about was the family past. He simply resumed the monologue he had been carrying on all my life, and again I was forced to be quiet and listen and try, this time out of sorrow and some last lingering hope of revelation, to understand the meaning of his words.

The story he told me was one he had told at least a dozen times before, and I sat for a long time in a chair beside his bed watching his badly wasted face and his dry lips moving, the stubble on his cheeks gray, his hands nothing but bone and skin with their swollen finger joints, lifting from the covers as he talked, the light gray in that Veterans Hospital room, in that sad dull South Dakota town, in the dead, gray middle of the winter, thinking what a place to die, what a place for him to die, while behind a curtain in the next bed a man coughed out his lungs and softly wept, and my father's voice talked on, his eyes bright with a child's expectancy of secrets and surprises, his faith in the redemptive power of the past still so alive that I almost supposed it just might this one last time, because of the sheer trusting intensity of his belief, yield up to him the key to the mystery he had always sought.

My father's story had, like so much else about him, absolutely no connection with the time or place of the telling, no relation at all to that hospital room or that dead town or the fact of his dying. It belonged not only to another age but to another order of imagination, and no matter how many times I heard it, it remained as unbelievable to me as any Gothic tale of haunted castles and rattling chains. Yet it did have to do with the one member of my father's family to whom anything might conceivably have happened, and who had lived a life at least in a small way compatible with the family's dream of high adventure and romance. At the center of that dream was the everlasting Aldridge trust in the possibility of a sudden windfall from Heaven, the unexpected acquisition of wealth or fame or aristocratic title that would bestow upon them the special distinction they always believed was their rightful heritage. It was of course nothing more or less than the wishful sentimentalism of the old novels, the mechanical trickery whereby the supposedly peasant child is discovered to be of noble blood, or news of a mysterious legacy arrives just in time to save the virtue of the outcast servant girl. But although life in America had long ago ceased to imitate this kind of melodrama—if, indeed, it ever had—the Aldridges clung to it as if it were a practical guide to what life could be expected to offer. My father's

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brothers, of whom there were six, had held to it even as they had settled down and gone into business or become farmers and raised families and lived long enough to be able to see that nothing extraordinary was ever likely to happen to them. They had kept the faith to the end, even if the only way they had of expressing it was in daydreaming, tall-story telling, or the kind of fanatical romanticism about the past that possessed my father. But one of the brothers, the eldest, my Uncle Roy, had not settled down and, so far as was known, had settled for none of the conventional substitutes for the dream. He had pursued it in his somewhat aimless way all of his life, and it was much on my father's mind that, if the rumors about Roy could be trusted, he might just possibly have succeeded in catching up with it.

Roy had run away from home at an early age, had put behind him that small Tennessee town where he was born, and gone off, as my father rather grandly phrased it, to seek his fortune and his fate in the great gray world of men. He had always been a lonely, curiously isolated child who had never been close to his brothers and sisters or anyone else, so that when he left, it was merely a physical removal of what had been emotionally absent from the beginning. For years he seems to have wandered about the country, staying in no one place for very long, and earning some sort of living doing the only thing he was ever able or willing to do—painting signs for farmers and doctors and country storekeepers. He would simply go into a town, canvass the main street for painting jobs, do his work, collect his pay, and move on. My father recalls that for long periods the family would hear nothing from Roy, then suddenly he would turn up, hang around the house for a while, and then as suddenly disappear. During these brief visits he would occasionally tell his brothers a little something about his adventures, such as they were, but most often he was silent and aloof and one morning he would be gone, having left so little impression that for days he would scarcely be missed.

What impelled him to behave in this way I do not know. Presumably, he had the typical vague wanderlust of his class and time, the same sort that drove his forebears and his immediate family to keep moving westward from Virginia to Kentucky, then down to Tennessee, then on to Indiana and across the Great Plains, and that has so seriously afflicted both my father and me. But he also had the temperament of the itinerant artist, and I always suspected that he had had trouble with my grandfather, a stern and difficult man who had the beard and, I gather, the pride of Jehovah, and who probably could not find much tolerance in his heart for a son who cared for nothing but dabbling in paints. I remember once seeing some of Roy's lettering work (although none of his paintings, if he ever actually produced any), and he did seem to have a real gift for

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executing the old-fashioned style of beautifully flowing, intricately ornate cursive script. But I never supposed that the genius of a Rembrandt had been wasted on the storefronts of Tennessee. Roy's talent made him restless rather than productive, and so he wandered. Inevitably, his history is spotty. There are large gaps in it when simply no one knew where he was or probably much cared. But it may have been during one of these undocumented periods that he did or did not marry an Englishwoman, alleged to possess both wealth and title, and have a child by her. Family legend has it that he did, although again no one knows for sure, and I have never understood how the story became legend unless Roy himself told it. But what seems to be reasonably well established is that at some time in the late nineties an English lawyer appeared in the town where the family had lived. The lawyer made inquiries as to the whereabouts of Roy Aldridge and of course was told that he had not been heard of for years. My grandfather had died by then, and my grandmother, my father, and his brothers and sisters had moved on, leaving, it seems, no forwarding addresses. Nothing else is known except that, a considerable time after the lawyer's visit, Roy is supposed to have driven into the old hometown in a chauffeured limousine, and witnesses say that he was dressed in exceedingly fine clothes and made a point of flashing large rolls of bills, which he spent very freely. He is then supposed to have driven out of town and, in his typical fashion, disappeared without a trace.

When I knew Roy, he was an old man of seventy-five, a very small man with pale skin, long, gray-streaked, curling hair, and the face of Edgar Allan Poe. He was still habitually silent and remote, and his eyes had that crafty southern mountaineer look that seems to suggest either that the world is a con against which one needs perpetually to be on guard, or that one has lived a lifetime successfully conning the world. I did not know which was true in Roy's case, but one thing was obvious: if he had ever inherited a fortune, there was no evidence of it in his way of life. He lived in a small house, a cabin really, on a ridge of sparse timberland a few miles outside a run-down mining community in eastern Kentucky. By that time he had been married for many years to a very sweet and simple country woman and had three grown children. I remember that we spent an afternoon there very pleasantly, had a dinner of black-eyed peas, white corn bread, and fried pork chops, and drove away without having been offered a single clue to the mystery of Roy's past.

Nevertheless, not long before he died, Roy dropped a hint to my father that the secret of his life was to be found in an old trunk that he kept locked in his bedroom and that had never been opened by anyone except himself. Both my father and my cousin Raymond, who at the time

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was making a career of researching the family history, kept badgering Roy about the trunk, but he would tell them nothing. I remember that the trunk was a constant topic of conversation in our household, and we waited with a good deal of excitement for the day when Roy would let the family know its contents. It turned out that my father died before that happened. He never learned the secret and, as I say, it obsessed him to the very end. But a short time later Roy also died; his daughter opened the trunk, and found nothing in it but some old clothes, some faded pen-and-ink sketches, and a bundle of old letters—mostly demands from creditors for immediate payment of bills that Roy had run up in various parts of the country forty or fifty years before. But among the letters was one that mystified everybody. It was dated 1908, written in an uneducated hand, and bore a return address from somewhere in Kansas. It announced that the writer was Roy's long-lost daughter and that she needed money and would appreciate it if her father would send her twenty-five dollars without delay. There was no evidence that Roy had ever answered the letter, and all efforts to locate the sender came to nothing. To this day, no one has been able to discover for sure whether the story of Roy's inheritance was true or a myth. I, of course, never supposed for an instant that there was a grain of truth in it. But I was always glad that my father did not live to hear about the opening of the trunk.

However, there was one member of the family who took the story very seriously. My cousin Raymond could smell money in the garbage pit of a poorhouse, and the story inflamed his imagination to the point where he became overnight the most compulsive genealogist the Aldridge family had ever produced. One part of his mind must have told him, since he was anything but a fool, that the whole thing was preposterous. But, being an Aldridge, he was quite capable of shutting off that part and becoming utterly convinced that somewhere back in the family history lay an unclaimed fortune for the taking. By the time he began his investigations, he had liberally revised the story so that the English lawyer had come into town to inquire not for Roy but for my grandfather who was supposed to have been the sole heir of an uncle Stephen, although during the period of the lawyer's visit, my grandfather had presumably been dead for years.

According to Raymond, some time in the 1830s, Uncle Stephen had married an Englishwoman of great wealth, and the lady had been lost in a shipwreck. Her fortune had passed to Stephen, but because there were no children, it had been held in escrow in England ever since Stephen's death, awaiting the discovery of his heirs. I do not know where Raymond got this version of the story, but it is easy to see why it intrigued him. As the only son of my grandfather's eldest daughter, my Aunt Belle, he

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would stand to collect a major portion of the inheritance—if in fact Roy had not already collected it or, as seemed most likely, had through some chicanery or other succeeded in collecting only part of it. In any case, Raymond convinced himself that somewhere beneath the complicated network of legend and sly intimation lay buried treasure, and he went after it with the same fanatical certainty of success that drove his father to invest all his money in a non-existent oil well.

Raymond was traveling at the time for a tire-recapping firm, and the job took him on long trips to various parts of the country. But he made very few business calls. His days and nights were given over almost entirely to his investigations. He did a great deal of research in county courthouses and small-town libraries, and went to infinite lengths, at the expenditure of God knows what amount of company funds, to track down distant cousins and great-aunts who might have some scrap of information about the family past. He even spent the better part of a month exploring the genealogical archives of the Library of Congress, and while, so far as I know, he found nothing relating to Uncle Stephen, he is supposed to have turned up records showing that a certain portion of government land had been given to my great-great grandfather Aldridge in payment for military service during the Revolutionary War. Since we had never been sure that my great-great grandfather had actually served in the Revolutionary War—although family legend had always characterized him as a hero of Valley Forge—this news was reassuring. At any rate, at the end of it all Raymond had accumulated an impressive amount of information, every last detail of which he scrupulously noted down in an enormous ledger that he carried with him everywhere he went. Over the next few years this grew into a document running to some six hundred typed pages, but sadly enough, considering the work that went into it, it remains to this day unfinished.

During the Depression when, for a variety of reasons, my father had come back South and settled with my mother and me on a small Tennessee farm, Raymond used to stop off now and then on his travels to visit us. I remember being terribly impressed, even somewhat awed by him. He was the one member of the family who seemed to have real sophistication and taste, any sort of real flair for living, and at the time that meant a great deal to me. In taking us away from the Middle West and bringing us South, my father had separated me from all the children I had grown up with, and I felt cast among aliens whose accents were different from mine and in the beginning incomprehensible to me, and whose behavior struck me as altogether barbaric. Raymond was a visitor from the world I had been forced to give up, and he symbolized in my snobbish adolescent view a kind of culture I thought was rightfully mine. He drove a car that seemed to me the absolute apex of elegance,

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a new gray Nash sedan that cruised at eighty and had seats that folded down into a bed. He smoked filter-tipped cigarettes, which were rare in those days and seemed an expensive luxury, and he smoked them through a long ivory holder elaborately carved with fire-breathing Chinese dragons. He also wore a small, neat moustache, the kind associated in the South with the big-city dude or Chicago gangster. So far as my father was concerned, Raymond's moustache, like his cigarette holder, was one more indication of his basic shiftiness of character, his essential crookedness. However, to me, at the age of fourteen, it was a badge of suavity and style that I would have given almost anything to own.

But what fascinated me most about Raymond was the bizarreness of his eating habits. I recall one of his visits when he insisted that he wanted opossum for dinner. Now opossum is an animal no respectable white man in the South would dream of eating. Out in the country where we lived it was considered black man's food, and when Raymond made his request, my father took it very nearly as an insult to his honor, and I could see that his already low opinion of Raymond had at that moment sunk to a level beneath all possibility of reclamation. Nevertheless, Raymond insisted, and since he was a nephew and a guest in our house besides, my father finally gave in.

I remember that we went out after dark one night, I armed with a shotgun, Raymond carrying his big six-cell flashlight, and after a good deal of stumbling around in the woods, we found a opossum sitting high up in a persimmon tree. There was enough light still in the sky for me to make him out, and Raymond put his flashlight on him, and the opossum's eyes glowed bright red as I took aim, fired once, and brought him plopping to the ground. He was a big opossum and an ugly one with great patches of hairless, beet-colored skin and a tiny, wrinkled-up, foxy face and a long, limp, naked tail. There were ticks of some sort crawling on his belly; my shot had ripped most of his throat away; his mouth, with its needle-like tusks of teeth, seemed slashed open; and I very nearly threw up looking at him. But we carried him back to the house and Raymond dressed him, and my mother, who was in a daze of revulsion, consented to roast him, according to Raymond's directions, with sweet potatoes and new green peas, and served him to Raymond for dinner. Nobody would sit at the table with him except me. I even got up enough courage to taste a bite of the awful thing and found it actually not bad but rather like terribly greasy pork. But Raymond ate it all, right down to the last shred and bone, and pronounced it excellent.

My father never forgave Raymond for the opossum. But Raymond showed no sign that he was aware of having given offense. He was one of those men who had a compulsion to eat anything and everything he

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saw, and the compulsion was so strong in him that he was completely oblivious to the effect it had on other people. If he was driving along the highway and saw a flock of crows in a tree, he would stop his car, take his .22 rifle, which he always carried with him in the back seat, and start off across the field after them. Now it is extremely difficult to get close enough to a sitting crow to hit him with a rifle or anything else, and Raymond was no marksman. But if by chance he did manage to hit one, he would take it home and have it for dinner. He would also eat turtle, snake, toad, lizard, mouse, grasshoppers, buzzards, worms, mule, horse, cat, and dog—very nearly anything that breathed, crawled, burrowed, or hopped. He once told me that he had made up a recipe for sautéd dog that was so good you would swear you were eating filet mignon. He had only one stipulation: whatever he ate had to be newly dead. I have seen him pass something in the road and then back up to it, get out of his car, and feel it to see if it was still warm. If it was, into the back seat it went, and that night there would be a new delicacy on the dinner table.

Once, however, in spite of this fastidiousness, his eating habits very nearly killed him. He had apparently banqueted on God knows what that he had picked up on the road or shot with his rifle, and a week or so later he came down with anthrax. Anthrax is almost exclusively a cattle and sheep disease. Very few humans have ever had it, and Raymond is supposed to be one of the very, very few to have survived it. The doctors were understandably fascinated by his case, particularly after they heard about his tastes in food, and they rushed him to a hospital specializing in rare diseases. He was sick for a long time, but finally recovered after having had a portion of his trachea removed.

When I next saw Raymond many years later at his place in California, he had a silver tube sticking out of his throat just below the Adam's apple, and he talked in a whisper. But he was otherwise in excellent shape and had lost none of the charm that had so captivated me as a boy. Although he was about as Jewish as Abraham Lincoln, he had a mezuzah tacked up on the front door of his house, and he loved to preside over his dinner table—which was usually crowded with the children of his several marriages—wearing a white silk prayer shawl around his shoulders and a yarmulke set beanie-fashion flat on the top of his head. He still smoked filter-tipped cigarettes through a Chinese holder and was even able, to the delight of his children, to blow a jet of smoke straight up through his throat tube like steam escaping from a boiling tea kettle. His talk, even in a whisper, was, as always, witty and entertaining, and he was full of schemes for getting rich very quickly. He told my father with great pride and excitement exactly how many thousands of dollars he was worth and how many more thousands he expected to be worth after the certain success of a new tire-recapping process in which he had

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heavily invested. But as it turned out, Raymond had all the Aldridge talent for wishful self-deception as well as all the bad luck that seems naturally to go with it, and his new venture came to nothing. Not only did he not get rich quickly, but he came very close to losing everything he owned. He just managed to scrape through by mortgaging his house and car and borrowing on his life insurance and persuading his mother to sell her house and lend him the money from the sale. But I doubt very much that, even in the moments of his darkest extremity, his condition was ever real to him. His grandiose schemes for projecting himself into sudden fortune were the truths he lived for and lived by. He was capable of almost infinite conversion of his fantasies into facts, and I always thought it was a shame that his creative power had no more valuable outlet.

It did appear, however, that there was one fantasy that he could not successfully convert into fact, one scheme that even he had to admit held no promise of ever paying off. I remember it was in California that he showed my father the uncompleted six-hundred-page document containing the details of family history that he had gone to so much trouble to collect. My father sat up all one night reading it and the next morning rather triumphantly pronounced it trash. Considering my father's long-standing and profound distrust of Raymond, I supposed that his judgment was biased. But later on when I had a chance to read the document myself, I understood not only why my father had thought it was trash but why Raymond had never finished it. All the evidence he had been able to gather together pointed to one depressing conclusion: that the Aldridges, as far back as the available records went, had regularly and mindlessly married people of the same modest circumstances as their own and had, as a result, died poor, even occasionally destitute. Regardless of what my father persisted in believing—and believed to his dying day—there was no Aldridge fortune and presumably never had been. Raymond had finally satisfied himself on this point, and so had abandoned his history. It must have been the one illusion of his life he had been forced to recognize as delusion, and the shock to his faith in a beneficent God must have been profound. In fact, I sometimes imagine with my own kind of Aldridge mysticism that nothing went well for him from then on. Some part of him never recovered from the discovery that life was not going to live up to his bountiful vision of it. At any rate, not very long after that, Raymond died, and in strict keeping with family tradition, he died poor.

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Twelve Words on a Windy Day

GILBERT ALLEN

All Men Are Guilty Of The Good
They Have Failed To Do.
Outside a church, that sign whistles
and threatens me
with my own memories.
Why did I remain silent
and then speak
the lies?

I was not alone.
Hanrehan scattered the six-pointed stars
he had cut out in Art
for three weeks, then shook your door
and ran.
Others flung pennies against your windows
because you would pick them up
between classes
when you thought no one was looking.
Potavin even sprang for a silver half-dollar
once, two gallons of gasoline in those days
before Viet Nam, and cracked the glass.

I was your best, the one
you could always count on
whenever you faced us.
But on the last day

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while I still held a paper airplane
the most innocent prank of 1963
you turned:
"I thought
you were different."

I was more afraid, a bit smarter.
I never made the phone calls
I bragged about, never shouted *Jew*
into the mouthpiece before I hung up.
But the others took my stories
and did something with them:
ordered truckloads of sand
for your front lawn, stopped
your garbage collection, told the local newspaper
that you had died.

You did nothing
but fail to become angry.
You left the year after
I came, your last straw.

Most of us are guilty
of our own survival, of the good
that we cannot even threaten
to do. You did
what you could.
The Spanish you taught us
better than I learned
was still awful.
But one day, struggling

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for the words to something I have long forgotten
I said: "Yo soy un libro."
And you wondered
but you did not laugh.
"*I am a book?* What is that?
What are you trying to say?"

I did not tell you and could not
now, would not. I have spoken the truth most often
without knowing.
Wherever you are, my teacher,
take the book
I have become and see that:
though survivors are all the world ever holds
they are not enough.

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. . . And Man Made the Town

EUGEN WEBER

God made the country, and man made the town
What wonder then, that health and virtue, gifts
That can alone make swift the bitter draught
That life holds out to all, should most abound
And least be threatened in the fields and groves.

THE FIRST OF THESE LINES OF William Cowper, with its opposition between natural and virtuous rural ways and "gross and pampered" cities, whither "flow

As to a common and most noisome sewer
The dregs and faeculence of ev'ry land

has passed into common usage to such extent that, by 1907, Arnold Bennett was moved to write a sharp rejoinder:

God made the jackass and the bounding flea
I render thanks to God that man made me.

Here he rightly asserts that

For me a rural pond is not more pure
Nor more spontaneous than my city sewer.

As with all proverbs, the origin of the line has been forgotten. By 1951, an eminent French sociologist, Georges Davy, would quote it as an American proverb; and even as knowledgeable a scholar as Denis Brogan has attributed William Cowper's lines to Alexander Pope.

But origins are not indifferent if one is interested in town and country, their evolution and their relations. I want to suggest that the interrelation of country and town is more relevant than their antagonism. It is interesting to know that Cowper's lines were written a bit more than two hundred years ago, in 1783 and 1784, in a long poem addressed to those who "borne about / In chariots and sedans, know no fatigue / But

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that of idleness." The poem is called "The Task," but the title originally intended for it was "The Sofa," and it actually begins:

> I sing the Sofa. I who lately sang
> Truth, Hope and Charity. . . .

It then goes on to sing the tea table, the chest of drawers, the cushions on the sofa, and all kinds of other emollient comforts, even to a woolly lapdog.

It is also worth remembering that Cowper's verses were written from a large, though rather dismal, stone-faced brick house in a country town—a very average small town: Olney, in North Buckinghamshire, not far from Northampton. Olney enjoyed most of the amenities of its kind: a bridge over the river Ouse, a market and a High Street, a local industry (in this case, lace making), several public houses, to one of which the mail arrived and where Cowper got his *Morning Chronicle* from London six days a week, shops with bow windows (barber, butcher, baker, draper, and at least two grocers), a town hall, a prison, a blacksmith's forge, a commodious vicarage, and a church, the personality and evangelical enthusiasm of whose vicar had induced Cowper to settle there.

It also enjoyed the health to which Cowper refers, in the shape of frequent inundations that filled the cellars with water every winter, pestilential fogs that crept up from the Ouse and made fevers endemic, and generally depressing weather; and the virtue with which he couples health, in its ill-paid lace makers, "for the most part as brutal as they were poor," whose threats and shivarees eventually persuaded the improving vicar to leave town.

The curious thing is that a poem in praise of country life contains so much evidence about its drawbacks: Olney is full of "stercorarious heaps" of manure; it is inconvenient, and even provisions sometimes run short; it has traffic problems caused by "boorish drivers"; and ecological vexations caused by poachers who slaughter the game. Property is defaced by carvings and graffiti that leave "an obscure rude name / in characters uncouth and spelt amiss." Worse, Olney has thievery and burglars

> who compensate for days of sloth
> By works of darkness and nocturnal wrong.

All that we hear confirms what a slightly later poet, John Clare, said about his own Northamptonshire village of Helpstone:

> full of strife and noise,
> Old senseless gossips and blackguarding boys.

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Malicious damage to property in general and arson in particular continued to be the bane of the countryside into the nineteenth century.

Cowper's chief consolation lay less in ambient nature than in gardening, which edits and improves nature (though even there the greenhouse that he built was broken into and things stolen), and in the gardens of his friends in the neighborhood, especially the grounds of Sir Robert Throckmorton's Weston Park, laid out in the 1750s by Capability Brown as a wilderness—that deceptive wilderness which the poem mentions, "whose well-roll'd walks . . . give ample space to narrow bounds." So Cowper's happiest encounter with nature took place in one of those "natural" gardens inspired by William Kent's design of 1734, for the Prince Regent's garden at Carlton House, in London; and (as Marc Girouard reminds us) much of the English landscape that we now take for granted, with its grassy glades, its glistening sheets of water and its winding paths, not to mention the occasional ruin, was born out of a wonderful artifice contrived in the center of the biggest city in Europe.

All of this underscores the fact that Western civilization is, in the first place, rural civilization; and that its characteristic achievement is the making of the countryside—no less than the original making of the town, which owes its rectilinear grid to the furrows that a plow could trace. The revolution that began to affect the English economy in the eighteenth century and the French in the nineteenth was not at first industrial, but agricultural. Not just new crops, but new rhythms of labor harnessed the countryside to specialization and taught it to change its crops to fit the market, introduced it to the ups and downs of trade, and eventually to dependence on a lot of outside products. The dark satanic mills of modern industry started to turn and belch at first mostly outside towns, and worked their way into them only gradually. So the glorification of nature as natural has less to do with real experience and more with perceptions and conventions.

Marc Girouard, whose book *Life in the English Country House* has a lot of sensible things to say about such matters, thinks that the upper and middle classes of the later eighteenth century had reached a stage of sophistication in which they could react against their own civilization (civilization, as the word implies, being generally connected with urban life) and try to go back to nature—but to a nature necessarily remade by man and by his imagination. While going back to nature wasn't exactly a new idea in the eighteenth century, and going from town to country wasn't a new idea at all, treating nature as something distinct and apart, something that one could deliberately plug into and recharge, was indeed new, and would survive into our own day.

Of course, a townsman with no knowledge of the land could well confuse an agrarian landscape that had taken generations to develop

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with natural nature; and a non-specialist would not think to attribute scrubland, fallow, desert, or romantic mountain crags to human activities. But Cowper knew better, and his poem was a literary exercise in the fashion of the time. Its contemporary success demonstrates that it fitted this fashion and mood, and the survival of his catchphrase speaks to the survival of reactions and stereotypes that he articulated very well. When D. H. Lawrence moans that the country is so lovely and man-made England is so vile, one thinks of Alphonse Karr's quip that urban problems could have been avoided if the towns had only been built in the countryside.

I do not want to join in a debate that, by now, has little room for anything but platitudes. I want rather to recall some of the material realities involved, and to suggest that, if we pit town and country against each other, we create an artificial problem, because the essence of town-country relationship rests less in superficial contrast and rivalry than in fundamental symbiosis.

City and country life have always been intertwined. The contrast between them has always been less important than their close relations; and when the rural/urban dichotomy became strongest in the last century or two, it also provoked the most determined action to whittle differences down and back. The first thing to note in this connection is that, when Cowper praised country over town, the term *country* included country towns, and the term *town* really only applied to London. His poem being intended, as he explained in a letter of 1784, "to combat that predilection in favor of a metropolis, that beggars and exhausts the country." All England outside London being "the country," Cowper was really writing in defense of life in the provinces—another potentially misleading term that would only come into English use after Arthur Young brought it back from France in 1789. But if the provinces were a later adoption, being provincial already carried the pejorative overtones it has kept until today, with the standard connotations of being rude, unpolished, and less than civilized. When John Clare, who was a real peasant, published his poetry, which was received with the sort of admiration that would be evoked by a talking horse, his editors nevertheless deplored his "provincial expressions," and his "provincial usage" of faulty grammar.

A hundred years after Cowper and fifty after Clare, Henry James, recording his observations in *A Little Tour in France*, provided a litany of provincial limitations: Poitiers of the 1880s is crooked and straggling; Toulouse, which is "both animated and dull," has "dark, dirty, crooked streets," colorless and "irregular without being eccentric." Narbonne's "streets are mere crooked dirty lanes, bordered with perfectly insignificant houses." At Arles, "there are two shabby old inns . . . tortuous and

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featureless streets, which looked like the streets of a village and were paved with villainous sharp stones, making all exercise penitential." Dijon, which is wanting in character, is "old and narrow and crooked." And Bourges "is a *ville de province* in the full force of the term. . . . The streets are narrow, tortuous and dirty," the houses "shabby, without local color"; there is an "enormous number of blank walls"; above all, "there is a peculiar dullness and ugliness in a French town of this type" (where, by the way, no one knows how to dress well).

This was not just the view of a finicky foreigner. In the 1850s Alexandre Dumas described Lyon, France's second city, as "a poor mud town with a canopy of smoke." Arriving in Aix-en-Provence in 1890 to teach in the local lycée, Gendarme de Bévotte found not a regional capital but a provincial hive of "moldiness and corruption": "the population retrograde, jealous, living on gossip and slander, alien to any intellectual current, any activity, any life." Nothing much seems to have happened, or at least to have improved, since 1838 when Stendhal had published his *Mémoires d'un Touriste*, with its bitter complaints against cafés where you could not get boiling water for a decent cup of tea, and streets full of *pavés pointus*: James's little sharp stones that made walking excruciating. Such streets were one reason why Pierre Larousse's dictionary explained that there could be no strolling in the provinces, only in Paris.

For Walter Benjamin, Paris was the stroller's promised land; and the fin de siècle literature of cities is a literature of perambulation: strolling, sauntering, rambling, roaming, meandering, to gaze, stare, admire the passing show, contemplate a landscape. But it had not always been so. In 1787, Arthur Young had found walking in Paris horribly inconvenient and dangerous—toil and fatigue to a man, impossible for a well-dressed woman. Filth restricted the pedestrian's freedom to amble; and Nicholas Kharamzin, visiting Paris from Russia about the same time as Young, noted the death of a world traveler crushed by a cab because, whilst on his travels, he had forgotten the art of leaping in the streets like a mountain goat, "a talent indispensable for those who live here." Since Young's time and Kharamzin's, some streets had been widened and even endowed with the sidewalks whose absence made pedestrian progress such a dodgy affair. Even so, despite nostalgic recollections, Flaubert's old friend Maxime du Camp still described the boulevards of 1848 as awkwardly cobbled, ugly, and gray.

Before this changed, a crucial palliative had been introduced. A chronicler of 1837 noted that "since the number of carriages has increased to such a frightening extent for pedestrians, industry has imagined to open covered galleries, bazaars . . . ," passages, and arcades where potential clients safe from accidents and dirt could safely stroll

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and window-shop. The heyday of such distant forerunners of our malls runs from the 1820s to the 1860s. A utopian work of 1869 dreams of ideal city streets in the year 2000, by which time pedestrian traffic has been diverted into gallery-streets, fully covered, "providing fine shops and magnificent salons" where chairs, armchairs, and settees offer comfortable repose to weary walkers. At night such passages would glitter with the thousand lights of crystal chandeliers and gilded candelabra, "so that the most modest working girl could come to play the lady." A pretty dream. At least, by 1869, Napoleon III and his prefect, Baron Haussmann, had made available wide streets friendly to shops, to window-shoppers, to pedestrians of all sorts, and to the sidewalk life that we associate with a world now lost or rapidly disappearing.

Meanwhile, conditions for walking in London—which Young found "so pleasant and so clean that ladies do it every day"—had deteriorated. Those in Paris would improve as avenues were broadened, planted with trees, broken by green squares. Soon, Aurora Leigh was inspired to sing the city swimming in verdure, "beautiful as Venice on the water":

> What miles of streets that run on after trees,
> Still carrying all the necessary shops,
> Those open caskets with the jewels seen!
> And trade is art, and art's philosophy,
> In Paris.

And an English horticulturist, critical of England's sooty, packed, and cheerless cities, where traffic was often "brought quite to a standstill in some busy groove," hailed the Paris of the 1860s as "the brightest, airiest and most beautiful of cities." Yet even in Paris, a century after Arthur Young, a couple of American artists touring France on a tricycle made for two found the streets difficult because of the recklessness of the drivers and the vileness of the *pavé*. Contemporary evidence suggests that when drivers weren't reckless, they were often immobilized in traffic jams, and that what Cowper called "the stifling bosom of the town" strangulated vehicular performance even more than human.

One of the striking things for the student of urban conditions is the similarity of many urban problems, or of the complaints about them, at least since the eighteenth century, and especially since the nineteenth century. They are not the same problems, of course (even though air pollution must go back at least to the first English smoke-abatement law of 1273, under which one violator would be executed in 1307). They are not the same problems, but they are the same kind of problem: the dirt, the horse droppings (inches deep in London's Strand), which rain turned into mud that then splashed on pavement or footpath, when there was one, let alone on people crossing the carriageway (hence the army of

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crossing sweepers), and which absence of rain dried to powder that mixed with the grit and carbon from the chimneys, and the dust from the disintegrating pavement, in a combination as dire for nostril and throat as it was for collar and cuffs. And, of course, the smell—not just from manure and drains and sewers and the watercourses that served for drains and sewers, and from unwashed people all around, but from every kind of industry that stood within the town: breweries, tanneries, dye works, gasworks, distilleries, glue factories, and slaughterhouses.

Slaughterhouses were an advance. Urban historians—like the late H. J. Dyos and his colleagues to whom these pages owe a great deal—know that humans and horses were not the only animals to live and die in town. Even the larger nineteenth-century cities "still conducted extensive backyard agriculture": not just chickens or rabbits, but cow stalls, sheepfolds, pigsties, and beehives. Fowl were reared in urban bedrooms, horses lived inside town houses, sheep and cows browsed where *métro* stations and Lyons tea shops reign today. The droppings of draft horses fed a lot of birds and, at one remove, a lot of humans too. Contemporary towns were surrounded by market gardens that paid good money for horse manure. It took forty horses or more to fertilize an acre of vegetables, but omnibus horses, which were particularly well fed and robust, did better, and their manure brought more. And the resourceful French could also consume the horse, when it had dropped.

As they grew, the bigger towns and especially the capitals, swallowed the villages on their outskirts and created suburbs, some of which were going to become shantytowns, slums, *bidonvilles*. A historian of Victorian London, Raphael Samuel, reminds us that Notting Hill, for example, was first settled "by refugee pig-keepers from Marble Arch, in flight from the sanitary authorities." But most traditional towns included resident farmers, and stable facilities for daily delivery of milk on the hoof, and butcheries whose killings were performed in the street or backyard—in France, until the beginning of the twentieth century. And in England as in France, animal husbandry survived to the end of the nineteenth century in the slums or helped create the slums: with pigs, sheep, cows, goats, donkeys, chickens in the streets by day, in the houses at night.

None of our urban plagues are new. Noise, for one, is an old complaint. Or, rather, the very idea of complaining about it was a late nineteenth-century novelty. City roads were surfaced with cobbles meant to resist the iron-shod wheels of carts and hooves of horses. Carts rattled and clattered, so did the harness of horses that included chains, and the drivers shouted, and in due course the trams clanged and rang their bells, the railways clanked and roared and whistled, the factories hummed and banged and shrieked. So one can understand why they spread straw in the street outside houses where sick people lay—

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palliative to an insoluble problem. Perhaps the Victorian Sunday, where it obtained, offered a respite of peace and quiet amidst the general racket.

There was, too, the question of housing; and, as the nineteenth century ended, Sidney Webb described England's urban masses as being housed, washed, and watered worse than horses. But housing conditions in Scotland or France were even worse; and Webb may not have considered that poor housing for poor people, which meant for most people, was a social cost without which industrial society would not have developed, or at least without which no industrial society ever has developed.

Rural housing also was poor. What changed when people moved from village to town was that they could no longer build their cottages themselves, with midden and outhouse and the rest, but had to live in quarters dependent on the skilled labor of others, like builders and sanitary engineers; but dependent above all on considerations of cost. The result was that they sometimes had sturdier walls than they had left at home, but the word *slum*, born with the nineteenth century, had also come into general use by that century's end.

But the housing problem, as distinct from the problems of sanitation and public health, was not perceived as such until about 1880 or 1890, and this was partly because those who suffered from it most were used to rotten living conditions on the land, where they came from; they were used to overcrowding, dirt, smells, shortage of water, and abysmal hygienic conditions, which were sometimes different in kind but scarcely in degree; so the absence of amenities, like water or lighting or cooking facilities or decent drainage, was not made to shock them.

The ones who were shocked were the better-off, the more literate and the more articulate and the more sensitive, who disliked the new leveling crowds and the loss of personal identity they felt they suffered in their midst. For every Jules Michelet who joyfully lost himself in the crowd, for every Baudelaire who "bathed himself in the crowd" and found rather than lost himself in it, there were thousands of people like Mrs. Bulstrode in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, for whom the anonymity of a numbered house in a row held the threat of themselves becoming cyphers. One is hard put to imagine the screams at the turn of the century, when telephone exchanges switched from names to numbers!

Furthermore, if some people enjoyed the vitality of cities, others like Edmond de Goncourt deplored the struggle for life that went on in a Paris which, by 1886, had turned into "an American Babylon . . . ferocious haste of pedestrians . . . ruthlessness of drivers . . . the sweet, obliging, polished humanity of the old Paris is gone." More than a century before Goncourt, Sébastien Mercier had lamented that the calm and good humor once attributed to the people of Paris were no more to

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be found. One wonders when they were to be found. After all, the horrid present is always somebody else's good old times. But it does seem that, as they grew—and became even more crowded—urban centers became ever less urbane: the peculiarly urban art of living close together was turning from a social art into a martial art. And it cannot be irrelevant that *agoraphobia* was first identified and named in 1873.

So, the better-off city dwellers were concerned first with themselves. They became concerned for their destitute neighbors because urban conditions brought the wretchedness of the poor too close for comfort; and the sensibility of the rich set the benchmarks for the relative deprivation of the poor. It was the better-off persons who felt first the discomforts, then the dangers, of overcrowding and dirt and miasmatic odors, that bred disease, criminality, insecurity, that caused moral and aesthetic as well as physical pangs, connected with a new susceptibility to such things as pain (witness the laws against cruelty to animals that preceded those against cruelty to men). Their disgust with urban conditions made people forget comparable rural woes and identify the city as a fallen creation: a deviant from what Eric Lampard ironically describes as the "natural, more verdant, order of [rural] community life." It would be the example of the plush that inspired their poorer neighbors to attribute dire fate to social rather than to natural causes, which was bound to come anyway, because, urban productivity being more evidently man-controlled, urbanites tend less to attribute events to natural causes than to social ones.

The spreading awareness of deprivation and the attribution of its causes was itself a social process, reflecting the proximities and the possibilities of urban life. But even though middle-class criteria of environment and amenity became the general standard, it's still a good idea not to assume them as any kind of yardstick before the twentieth century. That country people didn't automatically share such standards is evident from the numbers in which they voted with their feet for city life. Already in Cowper's day, Arthur Young had been impressed by how many young country men and women fixed their eyes on London ("the number of young women that fly there is incredible"), and by their eagerness "to quit their clean healthy fields for a region of dirt, stink and noise."

We have seen what to make of these artificial contrasts: urban dirt and stink could not be much worse than that of farms where manure was the staff of life. By the last third of the nineteenth century, moreover, the dire conditions of the first age of urban expansion were being moderated. Living standards continued to be pretty awful for the many, but then they were scarcely less awful in more bucolic parts. In France, at any rate, living quarters seem to have been less crowded in larger urban

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agglomerations than in smaller rural ones. And army recruitment statistics indicate worse hygiene and health in the most rural departments than in the most industrialized ones. In 1874, it took 2,580 draftees to furnish a thousand recruits in working order in the Hautes-Alpes, 2,190 in the Basses-Alpes, 2,050 in Lozère; it took only 1,815 in the Nord, 1,790 in Paris, 1,776 in the Rhône.

Furthermore, urban proximity encouraged mimicry, and it seems that many of the urban working classes learned to appreciate cleanliness and light, and to integrate them into their own culture, to adopt materials and objects that enhanced light by reflection or sparkle or shine: bright paint, shiny lino or brass, polished metal and furniture, varnish and starch, and, when they could afford them, mirrors. Even what some denounced as urban nuisances, others could find attractive: the noise, the activity, the crowds, the artificial light the urban centers offered. A fifteen-year-old schoolgirl named Katherine Mansfield, arriving in London from New Zealand in 1903, found it all "most marvellous! The traffic is so astounding." Elizabeth Gaskell, no mean critic of the nineteenth-century city, remarks that "it's a pretty sight to walk through a street with lighted shops." It is no accident that Paris was exalted as a city of light: "la ville lumière." The conquest of darkness was one of the great triumphs of the urban nineteenth century, before it reached the twentieth-century countryside.

Oil, gas, and, in due course, electricity fueled that conquest. But artificial light was costly, hence for a long time scarce. By ushering daylight indoors, the new technology of cast iron and glass changed the aspect and atmosphere of every day. The Saint-Simonians had called for palaces of glass to house their dreams of industrial progress. London's Crystal Palace incarnated these dreams, but less monumental achievements cut closer to the bone. Never before the nineteenth century had people seen a closed space that was truly luminous. Now they encountered them in cities all the time. Shopping galleries, markets and railway stations, libraries, museums, department stores, banks and hotels, places of entertainment or of exercise shone with novel splendor, saved money in the process, and set new norms.

Just when urban growth threatened to exclude greenery and light, "urbitecture" reintegrated both, first into public then into private space. To begin with, conservatories, hothouses, and winter gardens were the prerogative of grand hotels, restaurants, and the most sumptuous homes. Before long, however, bay windows, bow windows, and studio *verrières*, translated from the shops, allowed the middle classes access to the light of the rich. At the same time, urban planning produced sweeter air and green trees in "parks, wide tree-planted roads, public gardens, squares, and similar means of rendering great, ugly,

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gloomy, filthy human hives fitter dwelling places for great hosts of men."

To the social engineer, the straight lines of tree-lined avenues, spacious squares, and *espaces verdoyants* reconciled beauty, hygiene, and profit. The latter might have been foremost in the mind of decision makers; but the will to promote the circulation not just of traffic but of water, light, and air advanced less-utilitarian comforts. "It is all scenery," commented George Sand, "but adorable and marvelous." Tree-lined streets interspersed with archipelagoes of greenery formed a living museum where "the people could learn the secrets of light and color." Nor was the populist *châtelaine* of Nohant alone to scent the democratic implications the new improvements carried. Baron Haussmann's own city architect described his new parks and public gardens as flowery drawing rooms—*salons fleuris*—where ordinary people could taste rare luxuries: not just calm green or flowered spaces, but "culture," statues, and notably music—a scarce commodity, henceforth dispensed free by military or municipal bands playing in their public bandstands.

So gardens offered more than the elegant rendezvous that Manet painted in the Tuileries. By the 1860s they had become accessible even to poor folk, in London's Hyde Park or in Paris parks like the Buttes-Chaumont; and this despite warnings that "the inhabitants were so turbulent and revolutionary that they would soon pull down the trees, pluck the flowers, and pull up the plants by the roots." Access to the luxuries of the rich—greenery, air, light, beauty—would regenerate the race, develop their physical forces, improve their morals.

So if cities, and smaller towns, seemed repulsive to some, they were seductive to more: alluring lodestars of acculturation, but especially of excitement in the visual quality of their streets, or the entertainment value of the passing show they offered, in their variety, in their crowds, in their traffic, in their architecture. If the young Wordsworth, a gentleman like Cowper, was struck with enthusiasm as he looked upon London from Westminster Bridge in 1802, think what simpler souls would feel when faced with towers, domes, theaters, temples, and monumental façades on a scale they never imagined. And remember that, in Britain as in France, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the heyday of urban improvements and creations, not just in the capitals, but from Edinburgh and Bath to Bordeaux and Nancy.

Nor were urban centers only shows, they were also havens: the last and best hope of employment, of betterment, or charity, the magnet for the rural hungry or unemployed as for the simply ambitious. In ancient Egypt, the hieroglyphic ideogram for city or town represented a cross enclosed within a circle. This testifies to the importance of roads and especially crossroads, but also to that of walls, restricting but also preserving. While walls gradually lost their function and were done away with, first in England, then in nineteenth-century Europe, the

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bunched, crowded houses quite literally helped temper the wind to the shorn lambs.

This brings me to the central aspect of a centripetal attraction, which is simply itself: the urban mass, what observers of the 1880s and 1890s described as "the presence of man in his myriads," and "the contagion of numbers." The very massing of people and physical structures generated forces of attraction proportionate to density and scale. This theory of urban gravity was put forward in 1893, when London was four million strong and Paris two-and-a-half million, by Emile Durkheim, for whom a town's attractiveness was a function of its size, or what he preferred to call its density. Durkheim, of course, was French; and, as a good Frenchman, he challenged the rival German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies, who contrasted the *Gemeinschaft* (or true community) of rural life to the mechanical, alienating aggregations of urban *Gesellschaft* (or impersonal society). Durkheim pointed instead to the stifling effects of traditional commonality and found the city as much of a living organism as the village.

Again, this is not the sort of argument I want to get mixed up in, but Durkheim made the important point that high density has its positive aspects (for one thing, it reduces the walking distance to work), and he insisted that great cities have personalities too, in which their dwellers share and take pride, something few cockneys or *parigots* would deny. Every urban center I have known has a personality, generally asserted against its rural hinterland and against neighboring towns. So have the big cities, which define themselves above all by contrast to the smaller towns. And I suspect that the conflict between country and town, which has been plausibly interpreted in terms of mutual exploitation, rests also in the traditional cultural contests that are a necessary part of self-definition and self-affirmation. That does not change the fact that the great city's ecology is different in scale and nature, it takes longer to walk out of it, its rhythms are different; and this, in turn, creates a need for recuperation by escape into the country, hence perhaps a concomitant need for rationalizations of the sort provided by Cowper.

Yet escape into the countryside did not pose insuperable problems. Most nineteenth-century cities, all nineteenth-century towns, were perfectly practicable for pedestrians (though less so for ladies). One could walk out of Engels's Manchester as easily as one can walk out of Thatcher's Winchester or Mitterand's Carpentras today; and we know that in middling towns like Leicester, Toulouse, or Béziers, men of the working class would go out poaching in the neighboring countryside. Of course, London and Paris were much larger. But a number of their laboring classes, and even more in provincial centers, moved back and forth between country and town, with gas stokers and chimney sweeps,

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building-trade workers or factory hands getting seasonal jobs at mowing, hay making, hop picking, malting, or what have you. This explains why so often in the nineteenth century urban strikes seem to break out at times of the year when the striking workmen could conveniently get jobs as harvesters.

As the men who built and rebuilt Paris, Lyon, Bordeaux kept returning to their Limousin farms through much of the nineteenth century, so, well into the twentieth century, steelworkers and miners continued to work their fields, or those of their neighbors. But a more complex example of the interpenetration of towns and their neighborhoods can be found in the region of St.-Nazaire. In 1848, the fishing village perched on the northern shore of the Loire estuary was still a "*misérable bourgade.*" By 1858, it had become a "*petite Californie bretonne,*" growing like Topsy, its population increasing six- or sevenfold between 1845 and 1860. To a contemporary guide, its "fine houses decorated with balconies and sculptures" brought to mind San Francisco. Like California, it weathered economic ups and downs, surmounting the depression of the 1870s to grow on in the 1880s and thereafter, when the silting up of the river and the new scale of oceangoing ships confirmed it as the seaport of Nantes and of its region.

As docks and shipyards grew at St.-Nazaire, they attracted numbers of Breton peasants, especially from the hitherto isolated region of the Grande Brière nearby: marshes, islands, canals, some seventeen thousand acres of bog held in common by seventeen village communities that mined it for fish and fuel, salt and fertilizer. As long as memory went, traditional production and exchange had kept the Grande Brière decrepit, poor but self-supporting. By the last third of the nineteenth century demand for their salt, sardines, and peat waned with catastrophic results for their economy. So, Brièrons began to look for work in nearby St.-Nazaire, as builders, sailors, dockers, shipwrights—notably in the new shipyards and ironworks. And two things happened: on the one hand, these backward, ultraconservative peasants turned to syndicalism and the Left, and turned their villages to radical-socialism and socialism; on the other hand, the endemic sickness and "sordid misery" of Brièrois villages gave way to betterment, however relative. Exporting leeches, but also manufacturing wax flowers, pottery, baskets, and wickerwork, the Brièrois and Brièroises of the twentieth century are healthier, better schooled, and better off. They are also less endogamous, less reactionary, less Catholic.

So, urban life was not isolated from the countryside. It never had been. The distinction between town and country was sharp, but passage from one to the other was easy. And it came naturally. It was easy in the first place because of promenades, picnics, and "walks" to nearby farms,

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villages, taverns, beauty spots. But it was also normal to combine urban residence and rural property, and in many parts of France, not just the bourgeois, but artisans and tradesmen traditionally owned or rented a country cabin within walking distance, a hunting lodge, a vineyard, or some other rural retreat. Cowper had written appreciatively of retreats whence one could hear the roar of the Great Babel "at a safe distance." Appropriately, by the twentieth century, London Transport would use his verses to publicize the suburban charms of Golders Green. But already, in the 1860s, a disciple of Saint-Simon (Alfred Pallu) working with the same Duc de Morny who took a hand in launching Deauville as a posh seaside resort, developed Le Vésinet as an elite garden suburb to the west of Paris, where no factories or manufactures would rear their ugly heads and where each new landowner could enjoy a free pass on the Paris–St. Germain railway line.

That is the way a lot of suburbs started out. Others began as objectives for what one might call recreative short-term excursions: for example, Richmond or Putney, or Passy, which was the nearest spa where Parisians could drink the waters. It would be the greater cities—above all London and Paris that were soon imitated by lesser provincial capitals—which first de-ruralized themselves, then urbanized their suburbs and piled up still more suburbs beyond, then developed a new greening of the cities, and a host of measures designed to re-facilitate access to the land, to allotments, to gardening, to fresh air. These same mushrooming centers also developed the nineteenth-century practice of holiday escape, partly because their need was greater, partly because the larger the urban complex, the more difficult informal short-term escape became; but also because the greater the center, the greater the means of communication that made escape possible and economical, by offering trains that were frequent and convenient, cheap fares, family fares, excursion fares, and so on. And the nineteenth-century development of restorative holiday-making in the shape of curism and tourism—a marriage of country offer and urban demand inspired by the characteristically modern conjunction of moral improvement, medical science, communications, and capitalist enterprise—would do a great deal to re-establish or reinforce the waning symbiosis of country and town.

While country folk were flowing into towns, townsfolk were colonizing and, as they liked to think, "civilizing" bumpkinland. Nor did spas, watering places, seaside resorts develop in isolation. Their growth affected the countryside around. However unimpressive from the perspective of the city (and of its historians), little towns have always affected their surrounding countryside. Regional marketing, administrative and shopping centers, social capitals, the site of courts, colleges, and sometimes university faculties, residence of country gentry and of

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bourgeois landowners, centers of traffic, commerce, and craftsmanship, but also of leisure activities—little towns represented urban culture in regions that—as Richard Jefferies put it in 1880—long remained "separate countries" where people behaved as distinctly as "a nation amongst themselves." As in Cowper's day, but more so over time, they took in, read, and discussed metropolitan publications. Many supported one or more local newspapers that filtered metropolitan news but also affirmed their regional self-consciousness. And even the smallest maintained or aspired to a theater, where metropolitan notions and big-city taste could affect local society as surely as they did through the models and patterns displayed by dressmaker, milliner, or novelty store.

Compared to the urban revolution of the capitals, social and cultural activities in such places altered as slowly as physical conditions. In the fast-growing spas, however, modernity came in with a rush and its effects on rural neighborhoods were swift and sharp. At Royan, for example, on the north shore of the Gironde estuary, a few mid-nineteenth-century decades saw a small village lacking either roads or harbor turn into a *ville d'eau*. Royan in the 1830s had known no books, no church, no entertainment, no amenities. By the 1870s, its chronicler could exult in all these, and more. What was more important, "Royan's wellbeing flowed out to the countryside. The neighboring sharecropper who had sold her eggs 8 *sous* the dozen, sold them at 15 *sous*, and butter too, and chicken. On her profits she bought a second cow. The market gardener once sold his melons, tomatoes, artichokes, eggplants, for whatever he could get. Today he grows more fruit, more vegetables, flowers, and gets for them four times what he got before." Land had gone up in price. Cash transactions, once exceptional, had become routine. Paper money, shortly before suspect and rejected, was accepted without a second thought, as in any town.

So city folk were bringing city ways into the country. They also brought the country back to town in the form of illustrations, maps, eventually photographs, picture postcards, and, not least, landscape prints and paintings. Modern urban man, explained one painter, needs rest from the crowded conditions that he lives in. Landscape paintings could provide temporary relief when the country itself was not available. By mid-nineteenth century, one satirist counted more painters than peasants in the French countryside. And the Impressionists were still to come!

The right to rest and recreation was also being conceded to new categories of folk, and recent publicity suggests how far the fallout of apparently trivial developments could go. On the poor plateau of the Vélay, in central France, there subsist a number of pinched Protestant villages that have survived the *dragonnades*. One of these, on barren

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soil, with no industry but the making of brooms from the local heather, is called Chambon-sur-Lignon. Philip Hallie's moving book, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed,* is about how between 1940 and 1944 the people of Chambon sheltered thousands of Jewish (and non-Jewish) refugees, and saved them from Vichy and from the Germans at the risk of their own lives. Hallie attributes this courage and compassion to Chambon's Protestant inheritance and to the initiatives of its heroic pastor, André Trocmé. But he does not know that the story goes back beyond Trocmé, to another pastor called Louis Comte who, as the nineteenth century ended, was looking for a place where little children from Saint-Étienne could get fresh air and sunshine.

Saint-Étienne was one of industrial France's darkest boom towns. It had mushroomed with the nineteenth century from a dirty village to a large, though equally dirty, agglomeration full of smoke and noise and transplanted peasants ill-adjusted to the rhythms and disciplines of urban living and ill-equipped to escape them. And these were just the problems which, by the nineteenth century's end, generated concern for the physical and moral well-being not just of the few who could afford holidays but of the many who couldn't.

In the 1890s, Louis Comte, who was a social pastor much like Hallie's André Trocmé, founded one of the first holiday colonies for working-class children; and he placed it in Chambon, partly because the village was Protestant and partly because it was on a new direct railroad line less than fifty miles away. He placed the children in peasant families, and he demanded, which was unusual, that the peasants treat the children as if they were their own. More than that, Comte was as interested in the isolated backward peasants of the Haute-Loire as he was in the skinny, sickly kids of Saint-Étienne; so the interchange that he began was two-sided, teaching the peasants to improve livestock, their farming methods, their hygiene and living conditions; and the visitors increased in number from fifty-three in 1893 to nearly three thousand thirty years later, coming from a lot of different places and including not just children but adolescents, their mothers, and assorted invalids, or just people of modest means looking for a break. In 1951, for example, Albert Camus would spend his holidays there.

After 1900, some hospice-dormitories were built in Chambon, and a hospital, eventually a college and a couple of hotels, and many boarding houses, all of which offered the Chambonites a chance to make ends meet; and Chambon became a very modest spa for modest people. But the original principle of placing the children with the local population continued predominant, relations between holiday-makers and locals continued unusually close, and so did relations between the locals and the Chapel. So the facilities were there, and the familiarity with

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strangers, and the local tradition that pretty much pointed the way for André Trocmé to go to Chambon in 1940 and made it possible for him to shelter the Jews.

There were lots of other little spas in France where this did not happen, and there were lots of other isolated Protestant villages in France where it did not happen either. So Hallie has written a chronicle of courage and enterprise and personal leadership. But, as I said at the beginning, origins are not indifferent either; and the mutually profitable and mutually improving relationship established in 1900, which helped to save the economy of a village and the children of an industrial town, could be put to use two score years later to save the honor of the villagers and the lives of the children of an industrial civilization bent on its own destruction.

Comte's initiative is not only untypical of one sort of urban effect on the countryside, it is also the symbol of a reversal in the country-town relationship. In 1900, the tide that carried country people to town was turning, and today it has turned with a vengeance. Post-industrial society exists as a rural-urban continuum. While city folk have grown in numbers, those living in the country and in small towns with a population below fifteen thousand account for large minorities. Still only a few thousand strong, Cowper's Olney has a bit less industry today and many more "boorish drivers" than it had two hundred years ago. Its fourteenth-century church attracts the tourists, especially numerous on Shrove Tuesday when the town holds its annual pancake race. But Olney's convenience to commuters (eleven miles from Bedford, about sixty miles from London) has also made it a dormitory for those whose families prefer

> . . . to see the stir
> Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd;
> To hear the roar she sends through all her gates
> At a safe distance. . . .

And Olney, as we know, is not exceptional. Its example suggests a more profound reversal. Until not long ago, part, sometimes the major part, of the population of even largish towns worked in vineyards, in the fields, or at grazing cattle. Now an increasing proportion of those who dwell in rural communities work in urban ones. Further, it has been pointed out that rural productivity, rurally generated wealth, had been used for centuries to enhance urban consumption and display. Slowly in the nineteenth century, faster in the twentieth, urban productivity and profits have come to flow into rural consumption and display. In a neat reversal, the twentieth-century counterpart of the nineteenth-century *rentier* draws his revenues from urban industry and spends them on his

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country cottage, or some more pretentious establishment. A great many families, vast numbers of "self-deluded nymphs and swains / Who dream they have a taste for fields and groves," own a country residence. So there are days and times of the year when there are as many city people in the country "making swift the bitter draught that life holds out to all," as there are country folk. And the difference between the two is disappearing fast. Even the prodigality once characteristic of urban centers now affects the countryside as well: farmers are paid to produce unwanted goods (or nothing), as if they lived in town. Counterproductive dams and silos and supererogatory means of communication match the white elephants once reserved for cities alone. Whether in country or town, moreover, the basic equipment of a home tends to include machinery on a scale that small nineteenth-century factories might envy.

It may be that the meteoric rise and the sharp distinction of great urban agglomerations represent as much of a passing phase in our history as our enjoyment of pedestrian-friendly streets. Bedecked with shop windows, crowded with strollers to admire them and to admire each other, metropolitan thoroughfares flourished only briefly. Now they are lapsing back to their primary utilitarian role, while leisure crowds take refuge in protected enclaves like pedestrian malls, which re-create the galleries and bazaars of the recent past. Great cities, too, bloated by success, turn into conurbations that have little in common with models of the past. Urbanity turns to suburbanity, suburbanization aspires to countrification.

But in the new suburbanized countryside the peasants are not peasants anymore. Like Cowper's urban worthies, country dwellers too are "borne about in chariots and sedans." They are modernized, subsidized, mediatized, integrated into a largely undifferentiated economy and culture. Country and town continue to look different and to feel different. Yet it would be hard to tell, I think, just who made what.

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Magic on the Mind

Physicists' Use of Metaphor

ALAN P. LIGHTMAN

I remember the day, during my first course in cosmology, when the professor was trying to explain how the universe could be expanding outward in all directions, but without any center of the expansion. To his credit, the teacher had covered the blackboard with equations, but we students still couldn't picture the situation. How could something explode uniformly in all directions without a middle of the explosion? Then, the professor said to pretend that space is two-dimensional and that the stars and galaxies are dots on the surface of an expanding balloon. From the point of view of any one dot, the other dots are moving away from it in all directions, yet no dot is the center. This powerful metaphor, first introduced by Arthur Eddington in 1931, has helped students of cosmology ever since, in every country and every language where the subject is taught. It works for anyone who has seen a balloon inflated.

Metaphor is critical to science. Metaphor in science serves not just as a pedagogical device, like the cosmic balloon, but also as an aid to scientific discovery. In doing science, it is almost impossible not to reason by physical analogy, not to form mental pictures, not to imagine balls bouncing and pendulums swinging. Metaphor is part of the process of science. I will illustrate this point with some examples from physics.

In an essay on light and color in 1672, published in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society,* Isaac Newton describes his first experiments with a prism. He darkened his chamber, made a small hole in his "window-shuts," and let a ray of sunlight enter a prism and spread out into colors on the opposite wall. He then interprets this phenomenon in terms of a theory of light:

> Then I began to suspect whether the rays, after their trajection through the prism, did not move in curved lines, and according to their more or less curvity tend to divers parts of the wall. And it increased my suspicion, when I remembered that I had often seen a tennis ball struck with an oblique racket describe such a curved line. . . . For the same reason, if the rays of light should possibly be globular bodies, and by their oblique passage out of one medium into another, acquire a circulating motion, they ought to feel the greater resistance from the ambient ether on that side where the motions conspire, and hence be continually bowed to the other.

This passage is particularly revealing because it is a diary of Newton's personal thoughts in trying to understand the nature of light. Although Newton subsequently rejected the idea that light rays can curve through space, he continued to develop his corpuscular theory of light. In Query 29 of the *Opticks* (1704), Newton writes that rays of light are "bodies of different sizes, the least of which may take violet, the weakest and darkest of the colours and the most easily diverted by refracting surfaces." The largest and strongest light corpuscles carry red, the color least bent by a

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prism. Newton's mechanical worldview, of which light was only a part, held sway for two centuries.

A hundred years after Newton's *Opticks*, the physician and physicist Thomas Young allowed sunlight from his window to fall on a screen with two small holes in it. He then observed the alternating pattern of light and dark striking the opposite wall. From these patterns, Young proposed, in a paper entitled "Interference of Light" (1807), that light consisted of "waves" rather than particles:

> Supposing the light of any given colour to consist of undulations of a given breadth, or of a given frequency, it follows that these undulations must be liable to those effects which we have already examined in the case of the waves of water, and the pulses of sound.

Young goes on to describe clearly the interference of two sets of circular waves moving outward from the two holes in his screen—a process of positive and negative reinforcement that would produce just the pattern of light seen on the wall. One cannot imagine how Young would have interpreted his observations without having seen overlapping ripples in a pond.

The great nineteenth-century physicist James Clerk Maxwell used an elaborate mechanical model, actually a sustained metaphor, to fathom the workings of electricity and magnetism. By analogy with fluids, Maxwell envisioned a magnetic field to be made out of closely spaced little whirlpools, which he called vortices. To solve the problem of what happens when two of these neighboring whirlpools touch and try to slow each other down, Maxwell mentally inserted between each pair of vortices a system of electric particles that would act as ball bearings. Designed for the purpose of reducing friction, the electric particles were also responsible for carrying electric current. The mechanical metaphors here are striking. In his paper "On Physical Lines of Force" (1861), Maxwell notes:

> In mechanism, when two wheels are intended to revolve in the same direction, a wheel is placed between them so as to be in gear with both, and this wheel is called an "idle wheel." The hypothesis about the vortices which I have to suggest is that a layer of particles, acting as idle wheels, is interposed between each vortex.

Maxwell's most celebrated contribution to the theory of electricity and magnetism was the prediction of oscillating waves of electric and magnetic forces, called electromagnetic waves, which travel through space at the speed of light. These waves were theoretically discovered by Maxwell after he added a single new mathematical term, called the "displacement current," to the equations of electricity and magnetism previously worked out by others. How did Maxwell deduce his hypothetical displacement current? When I first learned the theory of electricity and magnetism as a college physics major, I thought that the displacement current had been derived by requiring mathematical consistency and the conservation of electric charge. But, in fact, Maxwell was motivated by the demands of his mechanical model. He knew from experiment that an electric or magnetic field can store energy. Because Maxwell had a mechanical picture of his subject, and a mechanical view of the world, such energy could only be mechanical in nature. Maxwell therefore proposed that electrical and magnetic energy was stored by stretching, or displacing, an elastic medium that filled up space, just as energy is stored in a stretched rubber band. In his classic paper of 1865, "A Dynamical Theory of the Electromagnetic Field," published in the *Royal Society Transactions*, Maxwell writes:

> Electric displacement, according to our theory, is a kind of elastic yielding to the action of the force, similar to that which takes place in structures and machines owing to the want of perfect rigidity of the connexions. . . . Energy may be stored in the field . . . by the action of electromotive force in producing electric displacement. . . . [I]t resides in the space surrounding the electrified and magnetic bodies . . . as the motion and strain of one and the same medium.

When an electric force oscillated in time, the electric particles in the elastic medium oscillated in response, giving rise to the so-called displacement current. The underlying elastic medium that allowed all of this to happen was called "ether." The ether was the material substance through which electromagnetic waves propagated, just as air is the substance through which sound waves propagate, by bumping one air molecule into the next. Again, in Maxwell's words, "We have there-

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fore some reason to believe, from the phenomena of light and heat, that there is an aetheral medium filling space and permeating bodies, capable of being set in motion and of transmitting that motion from one part to another." Maxwell's mechanical model for electricity and magnetism, including the ether, was completely fictitious, but it led him to the correct equations.

In 1931, the Belgian priest and physicist Georges Lemaître published a stunning model for the origin of the universe. It was already known at this time—both from Lemaître's own theoretical work and from contemporary telescopic observations—that the universe is evolving. It was also known that very energetic particles, called cosmic rays, were constantly bombarding earth from outer space, although the nature and origin of these particles was still a mystery. Lemaître proposed that cosmic rays originated billions of years ago from the radioactive disintegrations of enormous atoms and had been traveling through space ever since. Each of these ancient, massive atoms, in fact, was the parent of a star. Going back still further in time, when the cosmos was smaller and denser, the universe itself began as a single, giant atom, whose gradual disintegrations into smaller and smaller pieces formed nebulae, stars, and finally cosmic rays. In "L'expansion de l'espace," published in the November 1931 issue of *Revue des Questions Scientifiques*, Lemaître writes:

> We can conceive of space beginning with the primeval atom and the beginning of space being marked by the beginning of time. The first stages . . . consisted of a rapid expansion determined by the mass of the initial atom. . . . The atom-world was broken into fragments, each fragment into still smaller pieces. . . . The evolution of the world can be compared to a display of fireworks that has just ended.

In this example, both the literal and the metaphorical pieces of the metaphor arise from the unseen world of physics. Lemaître has been called the father of the Big Bang model of cosmology, but his primeval atom hypothesis went far beyond any theoretical or observational evidence.

The above examples should not be taken to mean that only the most brilliant scientists—the Newtons and the Maxwells—use metaphor in their work. Metaphor and analogy are rampant in physics. A graduate student and I recently calculated how gamma rays "reflect" from a layer of cold gas. In a discussion of this problem at the blackboard, beneath the equations, we drew a picture of a wavy line moving towards a wall. The line represented a single "particle" of light, called a photon, and the wall was the surface of the medium of gas. The conversation went something like this: "A high energy photon penetrates very deeply into the medium before it first scatters off an electron. Then the photon scatters several more times, bouncing around, losing energy, and finally works its way back up to the surface of the medium, where it escapes."

I will end with an example from the forefront of theoretical physics—the string theory. The concept of strings has emerged from highly mathematical and formal attempts to describe the fundamental forces of nature. According to current string theory, the smallest unit of matter is not a point-like object, but a one-dimensional structure called a "string." Here are some descriptions that leading string theorists have had the courage to put into print. "Scattering of strings is described by the simple picture of strings breaking and joining at the end." "Since a string has tension, it can vibrate much like an ordinary violin string. . . . In quantum mechanics, waves and particles are dual aspects of the same phenomenon, and so each vibrational mode corresponds to a particle."

Ultimately, we are forced to understand all scientific discoveries in terms of the items from daily life—spinning balls, waves in water, pendulums, weights on springs. We have no other choice. We cannot avoid forming mental pictures when we try to grasp the meaning of our equations, and how can we picture what we have not seen? As Einstein said in *The Meaning of Relativity*, "The universe of ideas is just as little independent of the nature of our experiences as clothes are of the form of the human body."

Sometimes, different pictures of the same problem provide new insights. For example, the path that the earth takes in orbiting the sun can be described either as a distant response to the sun itself, ninety-three million miles away, or as a local response to a gravitational field, filling or warping space around the sun. These two descriptions are mathe-

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matically equivalent, but they bring to mind very different pictures. As Richard Feynman comments in *The Character of Physical Law* (1965), they are equivalent scientifically but very different "psychologically," especially when we are trying to guess new laws of nature. In one picture, we focus on the two masses; in the other, on the space between them.

Physicists have a most ambivalent relationship with metaphor. We desperately want an intuitive sense of our subject, but we have also been trained not to trust too much in our intuition. We like the sturdy feel of the earth under our feet, but we have been informed by our instruments that the planet is flying through space at a hundred thousand miles per hour. We find comfort in visualizing an electron as a tiny ball, but we have also been shocked to discover that a single electron can spread out in ripples, like a water wave, occupying several places at once. We crave the certainty of our equations, but we must give names to the symbols. At the age of twenty-five, Maxwell reflected on both the service and the danger of physical analogy in a paper entitled "On Faraday's Lines of Force" (1856), published in the *Transactions of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*:

> The first process therefore in the effectual study of science, must be one of simplification and reduction of the results . . . to a form in which the mind can grasp them. . . . We must, therefore, discover some method of investigation which allows the mind at every step to lay hold of a clear physical conception, without being committed to any theory founded on the physical science from which that conception is borrowed.

When the quantum theory was being developed, in the first two decades of this century, physicists agonized over their inability to picture the wave-particle split personality of subatomic particles. In fact, physicists violently disagreed over whether such pictures were even useful. In 1913, Niels Bohr, a pioneer of quantum theory, proposed a model for the atom in which electrons orbited about a central nucleus. Max Born commented a decade later (*Die Naturwissenschaften*, Vol. 27) that "a remarkable and alluring result of Bohr's atomic theory is the demonstration that the atom is a small planetary system . . . the thought that the laws of the macrocosmos in the small reflect the terrestrial world obviously exercises a great magic on mankind's mind." Referring to this same Bohr model, Werner Heisenberg warned that "quantum mechanics has above all to free itself from these intuitive pictures . . . that in principle [are] not testable and thereby could lead to internal contradictions" (*Die Naturwissenschaften*, Vol. 14).

In the 1920s and 1930s, there were two competing formulations of quantum theory, eventually shown to be mathematically equivalent. Heisenberg was the architect of the highly abstract version; Erwin Schrodinger had worked out a more visual theory. In a letter to Wolfgang Pauli in 1926, Heisenberg wrote, "The more I reflect on the physical portion of Schrodinger's theory the more disgusting I find it."

Schrodinger, in his reply in the *Annalen der Physik*, wrote that he felt "repelled by the methods of transcendental algebra" in Heisenberg's theory, "which appeared very difficult" and had a "lack of visualizability." A few years later, in 1932, Professor Heisenberg ascribed the nuclear force between a proton and a neutron to the "migration" (*Platzwechsel*) of an electron between them. Where did the alphas and betas in Heisenberg's matrices or the readings from the electrometers say that an electron could migrate? Remarkably, Heisenberg's image of migrating particles as agents of force led three years later to Hideki Yukawa's successful prediction of a new elementary particle, the meson.

Ultimately, Bohr himself was frustrated in his attempts to intuitively grasp the world of the atom. In 1928, he lamented (*Nature Supplement*, April 14, 1928):

> We find ourselves here on the very path taken by Einstein of adapting our modes of perception borrowed from the sensations to the gradually deepening knowledge of the laws of nature. The hindrances met with on this path originate above all in the fact that . . . every word in the language refers to our ordinary perceptions.

Many contemporary physicists have essentially given up trying to describe the units of nature by anything based on common sense. Richard Feynman has remarked that he can picture invisible angels but not light waves. Steven Weinberg, like Bishop Berkeley, seems on the brink of abandoning the material

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world altogether when he says that after you have described how an elementary particle behaves under various mathematical operations, "then you've said everything there is to say about the particle . . . the particle is nothing else but a representation of its symmetry group" (R. Crease and C. Mann, *The Second Creation: Makers of Revolution in Twentieth Century Physics*, 1986). Yet physicists still use metaphors. Cosmologists still discuss how the universe "expanded and cooled" during the first nanosecond after its birth. Relativists still talk about the "semipermeable membrane" around a black hole. String theorists still describe their unseen subatomic strings as "stretching, vibrating, breaking." What other choice do we have? We must breathe, even in thin air.

But there is a difference between metaphors used inside and outside of science. In every metaphor, there is a principal and a subsidiary object, the literal and the metaphorical, the original and the model. When we use metaphors in ordinary human affairs, we usually have a good sense of the principal object to begin with. The metaphor deepens our insight. When we hear that "the chairman plowed through the discussion," we already know a good deal about chairmen, committees, and tiring discussion. But when we say that a photon scattered off an electron, what concrete experience do we have with electrons or photons? When we say that the universe is shaped like the surface of a balloon, what do we really know about how space curves in three dimensions?

Galileo admired Copernicus for being able to imagine that the Earth moved, against all common sense. But at least Copernicus understood that the Earth was a ball and had seen other balls move. The objects of physics today, by contrast, are principally known as runes in equations or blips from our instruments. Earlier physicists had an immediate and tactile relation to their subjects. Descartes could see the disjointed image of a pen half in water and half in air. Du Fay could rub cats' fur against copal or gum-lack or silk. Count Rumford could feel the heat in a cannon just bored. But in the last century or so, science has changed. Physics has galloped off into territories where our bodies cannot follow. We have built enormous machines to dissect the insides of atoms. We have erected telescopes that peer out to unimaginable distances. We have designed cameras that see colors invisible to human eyes. Theorists have worked out equations to describe the beginning of time. The objects of physics today are far removed from human sensory experience.

As a result, it seems to me that metaphors in modern science carry a greater burden than metaphors in literature or history or art. Metaphors in modern science must do more than color their principal objects; they must build their reality from scratch. Such substance, in the palm of a modern physicist, is often hard to let go. Although aware that the ether was based only on mechanical analogy, Maxwell believed it existed. The year before he died, Maxwell wrote in the ninth edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1878) that he had "no doubt that the interplanetary . . . spaces are not empty but are occupied by a material substance or body, which is certainly the largest . . . body of which we have any knowledge." If a giant of science like Maxwell was seduced by his own metaphor, what can happen to the rest of us? We ought not to forget that when physicists say a photon scattered from an electron, they are discussing that which cannot be discussed. We can see the tracks in a cloud chamber, but we cannot see an electron. Metaphors in science should be handled with caution, and with a clear knowledge of the limits of our sensory experience of the world.

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Poems

DAVID BERGMAN

My Father Almost Ascending

They've grown used to him, as he
goes out each morning to stand
among the ibis and crane.
Barely looking his way, they
call to one another, and
dry their delicate, long wings.

It is when my mother shouts
excitedly from the house
"You'll frighten off the birds,"
that they storm up as one
whirlwind of white, threatening
to take my father with them.

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A Father's Blessings

Now that he is nearly deaf, my father can't
get enough music. It wasn't always this way.
When sound first began to forsake him, skipping
out for hours at a time, leaving behind
no note to say where it had gone, just a buzz
that hovered about his ears before it stung,

he responded like a spurned lover, forbad
its name to be mentioned, canceled his tickets
to the symphony and then turned the tweeters
of his stereo to the wall. My brother
was given his big band records—thick, glossy
seventy-eights that slept in the raveled sleeves

of their original albums. And I, I
was told never to practice in his presence.
He, who had listened with pleasure as I played
upon the mangled rippling of the *Moonlight*
Sonata or ineptly deconstructed
the Bach Two-Part Inventions, now shut his ears

and took whatever measures would make them stop.
But worse was that he gave up singing. His voice,
which had filled the house with ballads and jingles
and eased us to sleep with mournful spirituals
sung in the deep-throated mode of Paul Robeson,
was silenced, or rather, driven underground

to emerge like Philomel's complaint in flights
of rare, urgent song. But now at last the purge
is over. Each morning he sits listening

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to the beasts broadcast their territorial
and erotic demands—furious herons
honking at the intruding swans, the loud plash

of mullets breaking open with muscled backs
the resisting surface of the slow canal.
At work in the garage, he whistles loudly
and at night he stares into the radio
as if he could watch the music escaping
into the living room—thin threads of music

like the pale hairs of light that appear to grow
from the luminous numbers on a dial.
When the melody rises above the range
of his reception to frequencies beyond
his grasp, he waits patiently for its return
and welcomes now the prodigal cadence home.

On my last visit when unable to sleep,
I found my father reading my latest work.
"These I like," he said. "Were I a composer,
I'd set them to music," and then he sang
line after line, beating time with one hand free
and deaf to whatever his neighbors might say.

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Coming to Terms with Chesterton

TERRY TEACHOUT

Henry James, writing in 1906, expressed the hope that the forthcoming New York edition of his collected works would provide them with "a form and appearance, a dignity and beauty of outward aspect, that may seem to bespeak consideration for them as a matter of course." An equally majestic air of self-assurance is given off by the collected edition of the works of G. K. Chesterton currently being issued by the Ignatius Press. The volumes are trim, elegant, and numerous. Eight have appeared so far, with another twenty-nine currently in the works.

Chesterton scholars have been publicly quarreling over the editorial principles of this edition, and Ian Boyd went so far as to publish the following disclaimer in *The Chesterton Review*: "As a result of disagreements with the publishers about what should be done to ensure the production of scholarly editions, I am no longer connected with the project in any way." While this is not a critical edition of Chesterton, at least not in the MLA-approved sense, it is certainly satisfactory in every other way, judging by the volumes that have appeared to date. When the final volume of *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* is published in 1995, it will be possible to purchase handsomely printed editions of all of Chesterton's books, as well as ten volumes of previously uncollected articles, instead of having to haunt the mustier corners of well-stocked libraries here and abroad. What more could a common reader want?

Such an enterprise naturally presupposes the existence of a loyal group of subscribers willing to shell out a fair chunk of money over an eight-year period, and it would seem, judging by the hard-breathing flier with which this edition was first announced, that the Ignatius Press is aiming its pitch at a primarily Catholic audience. ("Chesterton accepts the challenge of his opponents and sets forth his own reasons for accepting the Christian Faith, and he does it in a way only Chesterton could!") This marketing strategy probably makes sense, since English-speaking Catholics have never lost interest in Chesterton, who became one of the Catholic Church's most famous and voluble converts in 1922. The steady stream of critical and biographical studies that has kept Chesterton's name alive in the half century since his death in 1936 has been for the most part a Catholic undertaking.

But who else now reads Chesterton? The question would at one time have seemed absurd. G. K. Chesterton was an Edwardian literary personality of sufficient renown to share space in Max Beerbohm's *A Christmas Garland* with the likes of Henry James and Joseph Conrad and to turn up in George Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* as the character Immenso Champernoon. The decline in Chesterton's reputation among intellectuals, however, began early and quickly picked up speed. "Mr. Chesterton," H. L. Mencken wrote in *The Smart Set* in 1911,

> started out in life with a set of striking, if invalid, ideas. . . . Because they were so astoundingly unsound, they carried the queer, emotional conviction of revelations. So the world heard them avidly and

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called for more. But, alas for Chesterton, he had no more to offer! His whole stock was exhausted before he was halfway through his second book—but he kept on and on and on.

Edmund Wilson, echoing Mencken, subsequently dismissed Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, his friend and colleague, as "literary journalists advertising their barbarous prejudices with the rattle of a coarse verbal cleverness." This critical line has prevailed, and Chesterton's reputation has long been in eclipse outside of conservative Catholic circles. "For many people," John Sullivan wrote on the centenary of Chesterton's birth, "Chesterton is a name remembered, but remembered for the wrong things. In the minds of many who have never attempted to read him there lingers a legend of a funny fat man who was anti-Semitic, a journalist who wrote many essays and some poems, some detective stories and a great deal of apologetics."

All of the "wrong things" to which Sullivan refers, of course, happen to be true, and therein lies the Chestertonian problem. G. K. Chesterton may have been the leading Edwardian authority on Dickens, but he was also the creator of Father Brown, the author of the *Illustrated London News*'s weekly "Our Notebook" column and of such poems as "Lepanto" and "The Ballad of the White Horse," the editor of the notoriously anti-Semitic magazine *The New Witness*, and a popular Christian apologist whose books included *Orthodoxy*, *St. Francis of Assisi*, and *The Thing: Why I Became a Catholic*. To consider Chesterton solely as a "literary journalist" is to disregard that much of his writing was deliberately aimed at a mass audience; to ignore (or exaggerate) his anti-Semitism is to be guilty of intellectual dishonesty.

In short, one must take Chesterton whole or not at all. This is no easy trick. It is possible to read fairly widely in Chesterton and still come away thinking that he is an amusing trifler, a clever but perverse literary critic, an unbelievably inept novelist, a sentimental purveyor of shopworn religious rhymes. To get anything like an accurate sense of what Chesterton was about, it is necessary to read him carefully and in bulk, in much the same way that a miner sifts through endless pans of sediment in search of gold dust.

Until now, this has not been possible, for most of G. K. Chesterton's books have been out of print for decades. Fortunately, the first six volumes in the Ignatius Press's collected edition provide a representative cross section of Chesterton at his best and most characteristic. These volumes do not paint a picture of Chesterton greatly different in its particulars from the one most people know, but they do suggest the extent to which those particulars merit fresh scrutiny. One cannot peruse them for very long without realizing that Chesterton's work is a far more complex proposition than most of his critics have generally recognized—and that his legacy is far more ambiguous than many of his conservative partisans have been willing to admit.

Born in 1874 to a comfortably middle-class Kensington couple, Gilbert Keith Chesterton enjoyed his childhood so much that he showed a distinct reluctance to put it behind him. "I am sorry," he wrote in his *Autobiography*, "if the landscape or the people [of my childhood] appear disappointingly respectable and even reasonable, and deficient in all those unpleasant qualities that make a biography really popular." But the adult Chesterton was also perfectly candid about the emotional stresses of his early life, which began in adolescence and ended only with his marriage in 1901.

An overgrown boy who wore sailor suits well into adolescence, Chesterton daydreamed his way through St. Paul's School. Outside the classroom, he gave clear indications of intellectual distinction, starting a group called the Junior Debaters Club that published a student magazine in whose pages he exhibited striking literary gifts. Nevertheless, Chesterton's lack of academic discipline, coupled with a genuine talent for drawing, caused his father to send him not to college but to the Slade School of Art.

It was here that Chesterton weathered the emotional and spiritual crisis that shaped his later life. His friends had gone up to Oxford and Cambridge, and he found himself alone, buffeted by the stresses of a long-delayed puberty, undistracted by anything like adequate intellectual stimulation. The atmosphere in his home had been quintessentially Victorian, an amalgam of liberal convictions and religious skepticism. ("My father," he later wrote, "is the very best man I ever knew of that generation that never understood the

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new need for a spiritual authority; and lives almost perfectly by the sort of religion men had when rationalism was rational.") Lacking both the security of dogma and the safety valve of intimate friendship, the anguished Chesterton flirted with vague theories of solipsism and diabolism before finally working out the philosophy that he would carry into adulthood:

> When I had been for some time in these, the darkest depths of contemporary pessimism, I had a strong inward impulse to revolt; to dislodge this incubus or throw off this nightmare. But as I was still thinking the thing out by myself, with little help from philosophy and no real help from religion, I invented a rudimentary and makeshift mystical theory of my own. It was substantially this: that even mere existence, reduced to its most primary limits, was extraordinary enough to be exciting.

In 1895 Chesterton began working as a publisher's reader. He met Frances Blogg in 1896, and his desire to marry her served as a stimulus for finding a career. Chesterton never lost his oddly childlike aversion to the petty details of adult life. After their marriage, Frances Chesterton, aided by a long series of devoted secretaries, would take complete charge of her husband's wardrobe, pocket money, and daily schedule. Journalism, the traditional refuge of the disorganized, was the only possible career for a man such as Chesterton, and he took to it unhesitatingly, filled with "a new and fiery resolution to write against the Decadents and the Pessimists who ruled the culture of the age."

Chesterton began contributing a weekly essay to the London *Daily News* in 1901. "Thousands of peaceful semi-Tolstoian Nonconformists," his brother Cecil wrote in 1907, "have for six years been compelled to listen every Saturday morning to a fiery apostle preaching consistently the praise of the three things which seem to them most obviously the signs-manual of Hell—War, Drink and Catholicism." The young Chesterton was a pro-Boerite in the age of Kipling and Elgar. He wrote as a committed believer at a time when Victorian doubt and rationalism was giving way to Edwardian cynicism and, very soon after, to the shattering blows of modernism. The only faith he shared with the dourly Puritan editors of the *Daily News* was a conviction that England could be made better by the steadfast efforts of liberal reformers.

But Chesterton cloaked his alien sympathies in a lively prose style that captivated even the most hostile of readers: "My country, right or wrong, is a thing no patriot would think of saying, except in a desperate case. It is like saying 'my mother, drunk or sober.' " By 1906 he had published ten books, including two of his most important ones, *Heretics* and *Charles Dickens*. He was writing weekly columns not only for the *Daily News* but for the *Illustrated London News* as well. He was jousting with Bernard Shaw on public platforms. He was thirty-two years old and fully formed.

"The secret of his prodigious output," one of Chesterton's colleagues observed, "was that he had made up his mind about things, and his mind was as clear as crystal, his power of reason as powerful as a Rolls-Royce. He knew just what he wanted to say upon any subject that he tackled." What he wanted to say was rooted in profound philosophical conviction, and the fact that Chesterton, early and late, offered himself to the public as an Edwardian equivalent of the modern newspaper columnist has obscured the seriousness of his purpose.

Like Samuel Johnson, Chesterton emerged from a youthful crisis of the spirit fervently committed to the idea of orthodoxy as the fundamental ordering principle of society. "I am incurably convinced," he wrote, "that the object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid." Attracted by the stability of medieval life, Chesterton believed that tradition played an essential part in preserving a society's manners and morals. "Tradition," he wrote in *Orthodoxy*, "means giving the vote to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead."

This belief would later emerge as a central tenet of the "conservative" branch of modernism of which Eliot, Stravinsky, Picasso, and Balanchine are the latter-day exemplars. Igor Stravinsky, in fact, owned a heavily underlined copy of Chesterton's 1932 *Chaucer*, in which the following passages are marked:

> The medieval world . . . was intensely concerned with ideas as ideas, and not in the least concerned with them as modern ideas. But the modernists are intensely concerned with the fact that modern ideas

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are modern. . . . Chaucer was not troubled about ideas being new. It was quite enough for him that they were there.

But G. K. Chesterton, barely past adolescence, was working out these ideas in isolation at the turn of the century, and the emphasis that he placed on tradition was very different from that of the modernists who followed him. For them, tradition was the soil from which radical innovation could blossom. For Chesterton, radical reform was necessary in order to restore the lost traditions of a formerly Christian society. A lifelong admirer of the French Revolution, he did not shirk from the most extreme implications of his radicalism: "No traditions in this world are so ancient as the traditions that lead to modern upheaval and innovation. Nothing nowadays is so conservative as a revolution."

This point of view could scarcely have been less compatible with the intellectual conservatism of a T. S. Eliot or an Irving Babbitt, and it is scarcely surprising that Chesterton's political philosophy was developed in the social vacuum of a troubled adolescence. Still, his extraordinary originality compensated in large part for his lack of early exposure to the cut and thrust of public life; indeed, Chesterton's lack of worldly experience may well have been responsible for much of the freshness of his early work.

This freshness is immediately apparent in Chesterton's early newspaper essays, which were collected in an endless series of volumes with throwaway titles like *Tremendous Trifles* and *All Things Considered*. Written in a breezy, deliberately accessible style, these pieces invariably move from the simplest of pretexts (a lump of chalk, a piece of string) to the deeper philosophical preoccupations of their ebullient author. "There is no detail from buttons to kangaroos," Chesterton wrote, "that does not enter into the gay confusion of philosophy. There is no fact of life, from the death of a donkey to the General Post Office, which has not its place to dance and sing in, in the glorious carnival of theology."

These essays, though engaging, rarely show Chesterton at his best. Temperamentally lazy, Chesterton began dictating his work as soon as he could afford a secretary, pouring out column after column, drawing on the capital of his personality to carry him through slack stretches of inspiration. The Chesterton of the *Daily News* was the "G. K. C." of caricature, the jovial, absentminded Fleet Streeter in cloak and sombrero who tossed off such familiar essays as "What I Found in My Pocket" while gulping down tankards of port. Max Beerbohm's parody "Some Damnable Errors About Christmas" catches with unsparing precision the easy, chummy tone of the popular Chesterton at his most exasperating:

> That it is human to err is admitted by even the most positive of our thinkers. Here we have the great difference between latter-day thought and the thought of the past. If Euclid were alive today (and I dare say he is) he would not say, "The angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal to one another." He would say, "To me (a very frail and fallible being, remember) it does somehow seem that these two angles have a mysterious and awful equality to one another."

Chesterton's willingness to trade on his personality in order to reach a mass audience was a conscious decision, one that he never seems to have regretted, even after his early popularity had been dissipated by an increasingly belligerent radicalism. But it led him to fritter away his formidable literary powers in the weekly dribs and drabs of newspaper journalism, and it stood in the way of his writing first-rate fiction. "Mr. Chesterton's brain," T. S. Eliot wrote in 1918, comparing his novels unfavorably with those of Henry James, "swarms with ideas; I see no evidence that it thinks." Chesterton would not have quarreled with the thrust of this passage. "I could not be a novelist," he explained, "because I really like to see ideas or notions wrestling naked, as it were, and not dressed up in a masquerade as men and women."

Chesterton's unerring eye for the strangeness of the commonplace, which gives a sharp tang to the best of the Father Brown mystery stories, is exploited to brilliant effect in his most successful novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, a quasi-religious allegory of considerable sophistication. "Chesterton restrained himself," Jorge Luis Borges has written, "from being Edgar Allan Poe or Franz Kafka, but something in the makeup of his personality leaned toward the nightmarish, something secret, and blind and central." But his later novels and short stories are for the most part exercises in political and philosophical point-making, sometimes provoca-

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tive and amusing, more often labored.

For Chesterton, "the highest use of the great masters of literature is not literary; it is apart from their superb style and even their emotional inspiration. Literature, classic and enduring literature, does its best work . . . in balancing other and older ideas against the ideas to which we might for a moment be prone." While this anti-aesthetic orientation kept Chesterton from achieving distinction as a novelist, it also provided him with the dogmatic framework within which he wrote some of the finest literary criticism of the Edwardian era.

Although his various writings about Charles Dickens have been widely and justly praised, Chesterton's two most important critical studies are probably *George Bernard Shaw* (1909) and *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913). *George Bernard Shaw* was the first book to single out Shaw's puritanism as the salient feature of his work, a view that remains persuasive today. Similarly, *The Victorian Age in Literature,* despite its crisply memorable judgments on specific authors, is most convincing when it isolates such features of the Victorian age as "its praise of Puritan politics and abandonment of Puritan theology."

Shaw himself, while acknowledging that *George Bernard Shaw* was "the best work of literary art I have yet provoked," nevertheless went to some length to explain why it was "quite a misleading book." The nervous publishers of *The Victorian Age in Literature* felt compelled to append a disclaimer, stating, "This book is not put forward as an authoritative history of Victorian literature. It is a free and personal statement of views and impressions about the significance of Victorian literature." It would be hard to imagine two more eloquent tributes to Chesterton's skills as a critic.

Had G. K. Chesterton written nothing but literary criticism, his reputation would almost certainly be much higher today. But he asserted on more than one occasion that religion and politics were the only things worth writing about, and his criticism was at no time merely literary. In *Heretics,* a 1905 collection of essays, Chesterton discussed with prophetic insight the subterranean ideologies of such writers as Shaw, Rudyard Kipling, and H. G. Wells. It was natural for him to turn to explicit social commentary, and in *What's Wrong with the World,* published in 1910, he offered his first attempt at a sustained analysis of the problems of the day.

What was wrong with Edwardian England, according to Chesterton, was the tendency of progressive reformers to commit "the huge modern heresy of altering the human soul to fit its conditions, instead of altering human conditions to fit the human soul." Chesterton early realized that to throw aside tradition in the name of progress, as the Fabians sought to do, was to unleash the totalitarian demons. ("The old tyrants invoked the past; the new tyrants will invoke the future.") *What's Wrong with the World* makes clear that beneath Chesterton's surface commitment to liberalism lay a temperament at once radical and reactionary:

> There is one metaphor of which the moderns are very fond; they are always saying, "You can't put the clock back." The simple and obvious answer is "You can." A clock, being a piece of human construction, can be restored by the human finger to any figure or hour. In the same way society, being a piece of human construction, can be reconstructed upon any plan that has ever existed.

This passage suggests the degree to which Chesterton, by 1910, had become disillusioned with the inability of the English political process to bring about the radical reform that he saw as the only bulwark against the rise of totalitarianism. "I have not lost my ideals in the least," he wrote in *Orthodoxy;* "my faith in fundamentals is exactly what it always was. What I have lost is my old childlike faith in practical politics."

This disillusion was fed by Hilaire Belloc, Chesterton's friend and collaborator, and by Cecil Chesterton, G. K.'s younger brother, who set forth their profoundly cynical view of English politics in *The Party System,* which argued that England had for all intents and purposes only one political party, the party of inherited privilege, and in Belloc's *The Servile State,* which argued that the natural tendency of capitalism is to produce a submissive class of wage slaves and an increasingly intrusive welfare state. These ideas soon became pervasive in Chesterton's own work. One finds them, for instance, in such unlikely places as the Father Brown story "The Queer Feet":

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> The talk was that strange, slight talk which governs the British Empire, which governs it in secret, and yet would scarcely enlighten an ordinary Englishman even if he could overhear it. . . . The Radical Chancellor of the Exchequer, whom the whole Tory party was supposed to be cursing for his extortions, was praised for his minor poetry, or his saddle in the hunting field. The Tory leader, whom all Liberals were supposed to hate as a tyrant, was discussed and, on the whole, praised—as a Liberal.

One year after the publication of *What's Wrong with the World*, Belloc and Cecil Chesterton founded a newspaper, first called *The Eye-Witness* and later *The New Witness*, in which they expounded their political ideas on a regular basis. G. K. Chesterton's only contribution to *The New Witness* at first was his clever satirical verse. But he was drawn more deeply into the activities of the paper as his brother began to write extensively about an insider trading scandal of the day that centered on a group of Liberal Party leaders who had bought stock in the American Marconi Company based on advance knowledge of a government contract. Under Cecil Chesterton's leadership, *The New Witness*, already known for its anti-Semitic positions, accused these officials, some of whom were Jewish, of corruption. Godfrey Isaacs, a director of the American Marconi Company and one of *The New Witness*'s most prominent targets, subsequently sued Cecil for libel and made him retract his claims in the dock.

G. K. Chesterton assumed the editorship of *The New Witness* when his brother went to war in 1917, and after Cecil's death G. K. used the newspaper as a platform from which to attack Jews. Many of these attacks were aimed at specific Jews, particularly those connected with the Marconi scandal, though Chesterton consistently denied any hostility toward Jews as a group. ("Have you the serious impertinence," Chesterton asked in an open letter to Sir Rufus Isaacs, Geoffrey's brother, "to call us anti-Semites because we are not so extravagantly fond of one particular Jew as to endure this for him alone?") But the fantasy figure of the "international Jew," stateless, secularized, and incapable of undivided loyalty, ultimately became Chesterton's all-purpose symbol for the modernism that was disrupting English culture and uprooting English traditions, and at his infrequent worst he was scarcely more rational on this subject than, say, Henry Ford.

To be sure, Chesterton wrote at a time when social anti-Semitism was a commonplace among the English. Moreover, Chesterton was strongly committed to the idea of a Zionist state, and at the end of his life he flatly rejected Nazi Germany's "final solution" to the "Jewish question":

> Today, although I still think there is a Jewish problem, I am appalled by the Hitlerite atrocities. They have absolutely no reason or logic behind them. It is quite obviously the expedient of a man who has been driven to seeking a scapegoat, and has found with relief the most famous scapegoat in European history, the Jewish people. I am quite ready to believe now that Belloc and I will die defending the last Jew in Europe.

Some of Chesterton's admirers have consequently argued that he was not a true anti-Semite. Unfortunately, this view cannot be reconciled with the anti-Semitic sentiments that appear in Chesterton's later writings, both as explicit subject matter and in the form of oblique references. Chesterton's anti-Semitism was not nearly as pronounced as that of Hilaire Belloc, but it was nonetheless real, and it is the only blot of any significance on the character of the man George Bernard Shaw described as "friendly, easy-going, unaffected, gentle, magnanimous, and genuinely democratic."

In the end, G. K. Chesterton's anti-Semitism seems above all to have reflected his inability to cope with the crosscurrents of modernism. As a social and moral critic, Chesterton was unfailingly penetrating; *What's Wrong with the World*, in particular, is full of incisive commentary about the problems that beset the soul of man under industrial capitalism. But when Chesterton attempted to formulate concrete policies aimed at curing (never ameliorating) those problems, the results were usually too radical to be relevant. Nothing in Chesterton's experience had prepared him to deal with the practical realities of everyday life, and his political views, coupled with an increasing shrillness of tone initially fostered by the Marconi scandal and the onset of World War I, had a sharply diminishing effect on Chesterton's appeal as a popular journalist.

When *The New Witness* finally folded in 1925, Chesterton started a new paper of his own called *G. K.'s Weekly*. His assistant edi-

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tor, W. R. Titterton, explained this foolish decision with unintentionally cruel candor:

> Gone were the days when folk used to say, "What wonderful things this G.K.C. says!" News owners had found out what things he actually was saying and they did not like it a bit. It was not good for sales; it was not flattering to proprietors; Chesterton had outstayed his welcome in the newspaper world and the only place he could find liberty to wield his pen the way he wished to wield it was on his own broad sheet.

G. K.'s Weekly was the house organ for Chesterton's last political obsession, the creation of a new class of small proprietors through the redistribution of land. Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Revum Novarum* attacked "the greed of unrestrained competition" while simultaneously repudiating state socialism as a means of achieving social justice, emphasizing instead the importance of the traditional family and "the stable and permanent possession" of private property. Inspired by *Revum Novarum,* Belloc and Chesterton, who had converted to Catholicism three years before, created a new political movement called Distributism that George Orwell dryly summed up in a 1936 diary entry: "The Chesterton type of writer wants to see a free peasant or other small-owner living in his own privately owned and probably insanitary cottage, not a wage-slave living in an excellently appointed Corporation flat and tied down by restrictions as to sanitation, etc."

Chesterton's remarkable ability to crystallize his thinking in the form of indelible aphorisms makes his writings on Distributism worth reading. ("The new sort of Business Government will combine everything that is bad in all the plans for a better world. There will be no eccentricity; no humour; no noble disdain of the world. There will be nothing but a loathsome thing called Social Service; which means slavery without loyalty.") But Distributism, as Peter Drucker pointed out in 1939, was a futile response to the rapidly spreading political and social chaos of the interwar years:

> The only social ideal which [Chesterton] was able to produce was, significantly enough, *The Return of Don Quixote*—the most asocial, most isolated figure in all literature, who lives entirely in his own personal imagination and finds so little use for the real world and for society that he ignores them altogether. And so does Chesterton's modern Don Quixote ignore or overlook all social realities—class war, machines, the decay of society—of which the journalist Chesterton was as keenly aware as any other man in the England of his time.

Chesterton's later writings on religion and morals are far more cogent than his endless railings against the evils of capitalism. Years of excessive production had made his prose style coarse and verbose. (Douglas Woodruff claimed that Chesterton was capable of dictating as many as ten thousand words in a morning's work.) But Chesterton remained capable of first-rate prose, particularly in his posthumous *Autobiography* and in *The Everlasting Man,* his 1925 reply to H. G. Wells's *Outline of History,* while even the most skeptical of readers can admire the way in which his journalist's ability to capture the essence of a great man's thought in the narrow compass of a "brief life" made possible the 1933 biography *St. Thomas Aquinas,* a masterpiece of compression.

Time ran out for G. K. Chesterton in 1936. His death was the inevitable consequence of the excesses of food and drink and the horrible overwork with which he had long belabored his weakened heart. There were sympathetic appraisals, most notably T. S. Eliot's obituary in *The Criterion*: "Behind the Johnsonian fancy-dress, so reassuring to the British public, he concealed the most serious and revolutionary designs—concealing them by exposure, as his anarchist conspirators [in *The Man Who Was Thursday*] chose to hold their meetings on a balcony in Leicester Square." But Chesterton had worn out his popularity as thoroughly as he had exhausted his obese body, and within a few years he had ceased altogether to be regarded as a major literary figure.

Those who did not ignore Chesterton tended to misunderstand him, and one of the most revealing misunderstandings was that of George Orwell. As Eric Blair, Orwell had published his first magazine article in the pages of *G. K.'s Weekly*; as George Orwell, he returned to Chesterton constantly. Sometimes his remarks were genuinely, if begrudgingly, admiring. "Chesterton's vision of life," Or-

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well wrote in 1944, "was false in some ways, and he was hampered by enormous ignorance, but at least he had courage. He was ready to attack the rich and the powerful, and he damaged his own career by doing so." At other times, however, Orwell's passionate hatred of Catholicism, which he clearly regarded as one of the "smelly little orthodoxies" of his time, got the better of his judgment: "Chesterton was a writer of considerable talent who chose to suppress both his sensibilities and his intellectual honesty in the cause of Roman Catholic propaganda."

Ironically, Lionel Trilling, in his 1952 preface to Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, characterized Chesterton and Orwell (together with Charles Péguy) as

> men who have considerable intellectual power but who are not happy in the institutionalized life of intellectuality; who have a feeling for an older and simpler time, and a guiding awareness of the ordinary life of the people, yet without any touch of the sentimental malice of populism; and a strong feeling for the commonplace; and a direct, unabashed sense of the nation, even a conscious love of it.

The comparison is an acute one. Neither Chesterton nor Orwell was comfortable with the ideologies of his time; both were too idealistic for compromise; both were obsessed by ideas to the detriment of their art; both labored as popular journalists out of a conviction that those ideas mattered and that their import could be communicated to the masses. That last word is crucial. For Chesterton and Orwell, the masses were not the *Lumpenproletariat* of Marxist myth but the very source of English culture, and it was their respect for the common man that made them both quintessentially English characters.

Those who seek to remake the world almost always fail to understand why the world resists remaking, and G. K. Chesterton was no better than Orwell in this regard. Unswayed by fashion, Chesterton measured the first third of the twentieth century against long-abandoned standards and, not surprisingly, found it wanting. But it is precisely this lack of moral and intellectual stylishness that, paradoxically, makes Chesterton a critic of the utmost relevance, a writer with whom the modern age must still come to terms. "In psychology, in sociology, above all in education," Chesterton wrote in 1902, "we are learning to do a great many clever things. Unless we are much mistaken, the next great task will be to learn not to do them." Because Chesterton grasped this basic truth, his best work will live on long after the totalitarian societies erected on the dreams of his arrogant contemporaries have been reduced to rubble.

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A Visit to Edd Roush

WILLIAM ZINSSER

One of the first things I wanted to do when I went to Bradenton, Florida, last February to write a book about spring training was to try to call on Edd Roush, who, at ninety-four, was the oldest living member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. Roush had been a winter resident of Bradenton for thirty-six years and was thus its patron saint of baseball, a familiar presence during spring training at McKechnie Field, where he held court on a special couch out in left field and told everyone how much better the game was played in his day.

My book was about the once-a-year relationship between one major league team (the Pittsburgh Pirates) and its wintertime town (Bradenton), and I could hardly believe the good luck that had delivered to my chosen city one of baseball's authentic giants. As an outfielder with the Cincinnati Reds and the New York Giants for sixteen seasons, from 1916 to 1931, Edd Roush hit over .300 twelve times, hit over .350 in three successive seasons, twice won the National League batting championship, and compiled a lifetime average of .323. Defensively he was no less exceptional—historians of the game rank him among outfielders with Tris Speaker, Joe DiMaggio, and Willie Mays. "That Hoosier moves with the regal indifference of an alley cat," said his last manager, John McGraw, who once suffered the indignity of signaling to Roush to shift position in center field, whereupon the batter lined a triple through the vacated spot. When the inning was over, McGraw said to Roush, "Next time I signal you to move, don't budge."

I knew that Roush had been notoriously cantakerous in his playing days—probably the only player who ever talked back to McGraw and got away with it—and I gathered from sportswriters on the Bradenton *Herald* that he was no less testy at ninety-four, especially with people he felt were pestering him. That didn't augur well for my getting an interview. Still, I was determined to try—no older link to the National League's past glory would come my way. I also had a strong sense of time running out.

Not wanting to risk being rejected on the phone, I found out where Roush lived and drove around to his house. It was a modest white one-story house in a modest residential section of Bradenton. The small lot had two orange trees and a neatly lettered mailbox that said EDD J. ROUSH. But there was no car in the carport and no sign of life. The woman next door was raking her yard, and I asked her if she knew where Mr. Roush had gone and when he would be back.

"He'll be away for at least a week," she said. "He went to the funeral of his twin brother."

The sentence stunned me. It wasn't just the idea of two Indiana farm boys living to almost ninety-five. I also had a hunch that twins were genetically programmed in much the same way. Now time was really running out, especially because I had to return to New York at the end of the week and wouldn't be back for ten days.

Those ten days in New York dragged by; my thoughts kept returning to the white house with the mailbox. Every morning, the first thing I did was to open the *New York Times* to the obituary page. No news continued to be

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good news, and on the day after I got back to Bradenton I drove out to the house again. I chose ten o'clock for my second strike.

This time there was a car in the carport. The house had no doorbell—a deterrent to pesterers, I assumed—so I knocked on the kitchen door. After several minutes it was opened by a stern-looking woman in her seventies who said she was Edd Roush's daughter, Mary Allen. I explained my mission. She said she had heard about it. "Some damn fool from the newspaper called," she said, "to tell me that a big writer from New York was in town to do a story about Edd Roush." She stayed on her side of the screen door.

"We don't like to have writers sicced on us," Mrs. Allen said. "There are three things my dad has no use for—preachers, teachers, and writers. That's why it took him until 1962 to get into the Hall of Fame—the baseball writers weren't about to vote for him. He had to wait until the old-timers' committee voted him in. Of course he couldn't care less if he got in the Hall of Fame." She started to close the kitchen door.

Talking fast, I told Mrs. Allen that I hadn't been sicced on her and her father by anyone—that I was acting entirely on my own as a writer. "I'm mainly here to pay my respects to Mr. Roush," I said. I explained that my book wasn't about Edd Roush; it was about spring training and Bradenton, and I didn't think it would be right for such a book not to have anything in it about her father.

Mary Allen looked at me long and hard through the screen door. Finally she turned around and I heard her say, "You might as well let him in, Dad. He's here anyway." She unlocked the door and pushed it open. "You can have ten minutes," she said.

Until that moment I had been so intent on getting into the house that I hadn't given much thought to what its famous occupant would look like. I think I expected to find a frail old man wearing slippers, quite possibly still in his pajamas. I thanked Mrs. Allen and went in.

The living room was small and very neat, and in the middle of the room a small and very neat man was sitting straight up in a chair. The oldest living member of the Baseball Hall of Fame was wearing a freshly cleaned and pressed khaki shirt, freshly cleaned and pressed khaki trousers, socks, and shined shoes. His hair was wet-brushed down, and he looked at me with vigilant blue eyes. "Another damn-fool writer," they said. I shook hands as ceremoniously as if I were meeting royalty, which I was. The hands and wrists were still large—farmer's hands and wrists, unreduced by age. These were the hands, I remembered, that had swung the heaviest bat ever used in major league baseball—forty-eight ounces.

I pulled up a chair and set my mental timer at ten minutes. More probably, I thought, it would be eight or nine; Mary Allen was hovering at the edge of the room. I asked Edd Roush to tell me about his ties to Bradenton. He said he had first come down in 1952, by trailer. "If you didn't like your neighbors you could move," he explained. Later he built the house that we were in now, and he and his daughter had spent their winters there ever since. They spent the other six months in Oakland City, Indiana, the small town where Roush grew up—and, incidentally, first played ball, in 1910, for the Oakland City Walk-Overs. The family farm had long since been sold, and Roush and Mrs. Allen now lived on Main Street.

I asked Roush what he remembered about spring training in his playing days. "Spring training!" he scoffed. "I was a holdout every year so I wouldn't have to do it. I never came down until a week before the team broke camp. I only needed a couple of swings and I could hit with any of 'em. I was always in shape—I was born and raised on a farm; my dad ran a dairy in Oakland City."

Another reason for avoiding spring training, Roush said, was that the ballparks were little better than cow fields, full of holes. Why go to spring training to break an ankle? I asked him if he could remember any of those early Florida parks. "There was one in Miami," he said, "about a mile out of town. We players stayed at a hotel in the city and got out to the park by jitney. The jitney was a Model T Ford and the fare was five cents." But even in the major leagues, he said, "they didn't fix ballparks up the way they do now. The one in Brooklyn had rocks in the outfield. Every time I came back to the dugout I had a handful of pebbles." He was talking about Ebbets Field.

I asked Roush if he enjoyed watching today's spring training games at McKechnie Field. The blue eyes flared with anger. "Don't ask me about these modern players,"

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he said. "If they had come out to the park when *I* was playing we'd have run 'em out of town. These fellers bat .265 and think they're hitters. Their gloves are as big as two of ours and they still can't catch the ball. And they're millionaires!"

The thought of today's big salaries riled him, and he was reminded of his own famous effort to extract more money from John McGraw's Giants in 1927 after that club got him from Cincinnati. Roush had worked for McGraw once before—as a rookie in 1916—and both men had never forgotten it. McGraw couldn't forget that he had traded Roush to the Reds early in the season and watched him tyrannize the league with his forty-eight-ounce bat for the next eleven years; ever since, he had wanted him back. Roush couldn't forget how abusive McGraw had been as a manager and had sworn never to play for him again. Therefore when he received a Giants contract for $19,000, the same salary the Reds had paid him, he mailed it back. Two subsequent contracts, for $20,000 and $21,000, were greeted with equal scorn. Roush let it be known that nothing less than $30,000 could induce him at this late hour to put up with the verbal lashings of John J. McGraw; he would rather be quail hunting, and that's what he did while the Giants went south for spring training.

Just before the season started, a peace conference was arranged in a hotel room in Chattanooga. Roush recalled the meeting for me as if the sixty-one years had never passed:

"McGraw said, 'I'm not near as bad as I used to be. You play your game out there and I'll never say a word to you.' I told him, 'All managers say that; then when the player is signed they do what they've always done.' I told him I wasn't going to come down from $30,000. And there was hardly a darn soul who was getting over $14,000 at that time; I think the only one was Rogers Hornsby. McGraw said he couldn't pay me that much. I got up and started to leave. He said, 'Wait a minute—here's what I'll do. I'll give you $75,000 for three years.'

"I said, 'I'm not going to be with you very long anyway, so I might as well sign it. But the first time you give me any trouble I'm going home to Indiana.' Well, I played for that man for three years and he didn't say a word to me. And I always had to sit next to him on the bench—that was the only seat left when I got back in from the outfield."

Actually McGraw broke his vow of silence several times—most notably, judging by how vividly Roush recalled it, on the occasion of Cincinnati's first trip to New York in 1927. "I was out on the field during batting practice, talking to some of my old friends on the Reds," Roush told me. "The clubhouse at the Polo Grounds was out in center field, and McGraw must have been sitting out there by the window, watching everything. When practice was over McGraw come to me and he says, 'Roush, I saw you socializing with the opposition. Nobody does that on my team.'

"I told him, 'I played with those fellers for eleven years. I'm not going to ignore them.' "

Mary Allen announced that my ten minutes were up. But Edd Roush had a point that he wanted to make. "When I played that game," he said, "I played to win." He looked at me with his fierce blue eyes. "I told McGraw, 'When this ball game starts, all friendship ceases.' "

Mary Allen didn't kick me out immediately, so I followed her into the kitchen and asked her about her own life. She said she had been a schoolteacher in small towns in and around Oakland City. I mentioned that I had also done some teaching at colleges and writers' conferences in Southern Indiana, and soon it was as if there had never been a screen door between us. I asked whether it was a burden to be a Hall of Fame ball player or a member of the family.

"Just last year some fool put Dad's address in one of those collectors' magazines," she said, "and we started being really hounded for autographs. So my grandson, Jade Roush Dellinger—he's over at the University of South Florida—said he thought his great-grandfather ought to start charging money for his autograph. He said Bob Feller had been doing it for years and probably most of the other Hall of Famers, too. Jade thought it would put an end to people bothering us. So we had this notice typed up and mimeographed." She gave me a small piece of white paper that said:

EDD J. ROUSH IS NOW THE OLDEST LIVING MEMBER OF THE BASEBALL HALL OF FAME. DUE TO HIS AGE, AND THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF BASEBALL MEMORABILIA, MR. ROUSH NOW CHARGES FOR SIGNATURES:

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HALL OF FAME PLAQUES AND REGULAR CARDS	$5.00 EA
PEREZ-STEELE CARDS	$7.50 EA
BASEBALLS	$15.00 EA
PHOTOGRAPHS	$10.00 EA

MR. ROUSH DOES NOT SIGN BATS.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.

Far from holding back the flood, the newly announced rates quickened the collectors' appetite, and they began sending such a profusion of items to be autographed that Mrs. Allen started to keep an account so that she wouldn't get in trouble with the Internal Revenue Service. She brought a big ledger over to the kitchen table where we were sitting. Many pages were already filled with names, addresses, and amounts.

"Look at this," she said. "From the time we got down here in Bradenton on October 13, through December 31, the total is $2,976.50. You wouldn't believe some of the stuff people send. Last week the mailman brought a big box and we got it unpacked and it was the slat of a seat from some baseball stadium in New Jersey that got torn down. The man said he was sending them to all Hall of Famers. Well, there's no way Dad was going to sign *that*. If he signed that they'd send him a pair of shoes that they'd claim he wore; they'd be saying, 'These are his authentic shoes' next. We packed the thing up and sent it right back."

I heard the screen door open and saw Edd Roush go out into the backyard. I told Mrs. Allen that I thought he looked pretty spry. "He's had one stroke and any number of heart attacks," she said. "There was one last summer out in Oakland City that had me real upset. But Dr. Brink of Princeton, Indiana, said, 'Don't worry about him, Mary—he's too ornery to die.' He has at least six beers every day. Last month at the Governor's Dinner in St. Petersburg, which was held to celebrate the 100th year of spring training in Florida, he sat up on the dais like George Burns, smoking cigars. He's always been independent-minded. He had sense enough to put his money in stocks, not to build a big house, and always to buy Ford cars."

I asked Mrs. Allen if I could look at her ledger to see where the requests for autographs were from.

"Here's one I just couldn't figure out when it came in," she said, pointing to a late November entry. "We got thirty-six baseballs from Lebanon, Indiana. At $15 per autograph, that's $540. The check was from a man named William Daniels in Zionsville. Now there's no way that man could sell thirty-six baseballs in Lebanon; they don't even have a jail—it's that little a town. I wouldn't know that if I hadn't taught school in Elmwood, which is real close. Finally I remembered that there are a lot of small home-owned tool-and-die factories in that area, and I guessed that Mr. Daniels owned one of them. Probably he wanted to give those baseballs to his employees as Christmas presents."

I heard the screen door open again. It was Edd Roush going back to his chair.

"Would you like to see what goes out of here in a typical day's mail?" Mrs. Allen asked. I said I certainly would. "Come on," she said, "I don't think the mailman has come yet."

We walked out to the mailbox, which Mrs. Allen had stuffed earlier that morning with outgoing items. Most of them were lumpy self-addressed packages that the collectors had enclosed for the return of their autographed baseballs. Mrs. Allen pulled them out of the mailbox and handed them to me. I sat down on the grass to read the day's destinations: East Petersburg, Pa.; Roanoke Rapids, N.C.; West Deal, N.J.; Little Rock, Ark.; Center, Mo.; Canterbury, Conn.; Mahwah, N.J.; Centralia, Mo.; Virginia Beach, Va.; Bristol, Tenn.; and Brooklyn, N.Y.

I wadded everything back in the mailbox and started to say good-bye to Mary Allen. My ten minutes had stretched into an hour. Just then the mailman's jeep arrived. The mailman pulled all the oddly shaped packages out of the box, put a new load of oddly shaped packages in, waved to Mary Allen, and drove off. She and I reached in to see what the day's tide had washed up: twelve packages and envelopes from Idaho, Maine, and various states in between. The biggest envelope, elaborately stamped DO NOT BEND, was from Forty-Fort, Pa.

I helped Mary Allen carry the mail into the kitchen. Then I went back into the living room and said good-bye to Edd Roush. He was sitting straight up in his chair, staring fiercely into the past.

Six days later Edd Roush died. He had a heart attack at McKechnie Field, just before a game between the Pirates and the Royals.

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She Lost It at the Movies

JOHN PODHORETZ

Trash has given us an appetite for art.
—Pauline Kael, 1968

Twenty years after her movie criticism first began appearing in the pages of *The New Yorker*, Pauline Kael, the critic who originally made her reputation as something of a maverick, is now in the ironical position of being the grande dame of American popular culture and one of the chief influences upon a generation of younger critics. These younger critics, who have either consciously or unconsciously modeled both their prose and their manner of formulating judgments on hers, have themselves come to positions of prominence and power over the past decade. They include David Denby of *New York*, Tom Shales and Hal Hinson of the *Washington Post*, David Edelstein of the *Village Voice*, James Wolcott of *Vanity Fair*, and Sanford Schwartz of *The New Yorker*, all of whom can sound eerily like an echo of Pauline Kael—so much so that together they form a school of criticism that might go by the name of Kaelism.

Miss Kael's own position is today so assured that it is amusing to recall how polarizing was the effect of her emergence as a prominent movie critic for *The New Yorker* in the 1960s. She was almost too much even for the magazine that hired her; and for more than a decade she was alternated—six months on, six months off—with Penelope Gilliatt, a critic of more traditional views. If Pauline Kael is now a much-revered figure in the self-enclosed worlds of cinema and cultural criticism, in the 1960s she was considered a guerrilla of sorts, making war not only on moviemakers she found shoddy but on those of her fellow critics whom she thought mediocre or utterly wrong-headed. A lengthy *New Yorker* piece by Pauline Kael could drive people who disagreed with her beyond distraction into sheer murderous rage.

Kael's vivid, visceral prose was the first distinguishing mark of her criticism. Although there are touches of the conversational charm reminiscent of Randall Jarrell's literary criticism about it, Pauline Kael's style has a much more unbridled quality to it. Familiar though it has since become, it seemed tremendously exciting when she first brandished it in the pages of *The New Yorker*. Hers is a style by turns gushing with enthusiasm and bristling with skepticism. Kael's lengthy, rather shapeless sentences, mixing up-to-the-moment slang with a largely traditional critical vocabulary, spun down along *The New Yorker*'s slender columns, rolling off pronunciamentos, scorning falsity, cheering on what she took to be evidence of freshness and originality in movies. This style could have the subtlety of a sledgehammer, and often its force as well.

An enemy of bloodless gentility in all its forms, Pauline Kael was not much interested in the measured style of those film critics once considered "serious." Not for her the even-handed critical judgment, toting up the six strong and eight weak points of a particular movie. She was an enthusiast, and she let her readers know it; praise fell from her by the paragraphful. Superlatives abounded. She once even managed to find an encomium for a sixty-thousand-dollar zombie movie entitled *Night of the Living Dead*, calling it "the best movie ever made in Pittsburgh." Regular readers of Pauline Kael come to learn that she often puts her own spin on words. What are pejoratives in the ordinary critical vocabulary can show up in Kael's criticism as approba-

✪ JOHN PODHORETZ writes frequently on cultural affairs for the *American Spectator* and other publications.

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tives. *Messy*, as she uses it, means a movie that is not carefully put together and thus may have some real life to it. *Crazy* means that a movie doesn't follow established rules of narrative organization and thus may also have some life to it. Of the movie *Innerspace*, for example, Kael wrote: "This sci-fi buddy-buddy comedy sounds stupid-crazy-funky, and at its best that's what it is." She can also turn approbative words into pejoratives. *Good*, in the Kaelian critical vocabulary, is generally used as a means of damning with faint praise, while *sweet* is invariably used to connote the dreariest sentimentality.

Kael's tough-minded and slangy prose, with its strong anti-nonsense strain, seemed bracing, even liberating, especially to the young. College students who might not read any other contemporary criticism often read Kael to get the word on the current movies. The brighter students interested in movies felt she spoke to them with a directness few other contemporary writers could command. They would argue about her opinions, often, in conversation, referring to her as "Pauline." To a generation that took great pleasure in movies, she functioned as something like the critical equivalent of Auntie Mame. Even today she is probably the serious critic best known to younger Americans interested in the arts.

Certainly much of the credit for Pauline Kael's influence with the young was owing to the accessibility of her subject matter. Everyone goes to the movies, and every ten-year-old has developed a rough critical standard where movies are concerned. He likes or dislikes horror movies, not because he is told to or is educated in the matter, but because horror movies either thrill him or make him ill. Those who turn out to like horror movies often learn to make all sorts of hairsplitting distinctions about which are the superior and which the inferior ones. The movies may well be the first objects upon which children exercise critical faculties. For precocious adolescents with a bent toward popular culture, the discovery of serious but still playful movie criticism of the kind Pauline Kael wrote came as a surprise and a delight. "The picture says Popeye Doyle is a tough SOB who gets the job done," she wrote in her review of *The French Connection*. "So is the picture."

The contrast between the way Pauline Kael and Penelope Gilliatt, her then co-worker on *The New Yorker*, went about writing movie criticism was decisive. Gilliatt wrote rather refined prose in which she set out rather predictable opinions. Films by Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni, and other European directors were taken with the utmost seriousness; commercial American movies with lots of money behind them were assumed to be of negligible interest. This was precisely the kind of attitudinizing against which Pauline Kael had set herself as a critic. Kael was also opposed to the jargon-laden and humorless over-interpretations of the so-called auteurist critics, who at the time were making a great push to declare even rather pedestrian movies as high art with the director as auteur, or author, and the ultimate movie artist. Even before she had begun writing regularly for *The New Yorker*, Kael had launched a series of furious assaults on auteurist theory, accusing it not only of badly bollixing the discussion of movies but also of being false to the particular pleasures of the screen.

Kael kept this attack alive when, in 1974, she published a stunning essay on the great American auteur film nonpareil, *Citizen Kane*. She argued brilliantly, if not always convincingly, that the real author of this extraordinary American movie was its essentially hack screenwriter, Herman Mankiewicz, from whom all the credit was stolen by its director, the megalomaniac boy genius, Orson Welles. At the same time that she fought against the auteurist critics, she fired away on another front at those critics who took seriously only those movies that took up and earnestly dealt with social problems. Uplift of the kind supplied by *The Sound of Music* seemed to put her off quite as much as downdrag of the kind supplied by *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*. Art film fare of the sort produced by Alain Resnais she described as "the come-dressed-as-the-sick-soul-of-Europe parties." Kael stood well apart from such figures as Dwight Macdonald and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., both of whom had rather sorry runs as movie critics in those days, in refusing to accept the pretensions of *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* as great art.

Pauline Kael was at her most engaging when deflating the pretensions of people who she made one feel must really have secretly hated the movies. She herself adopted what might be called the highbrow-lowbrow position on movies. This position has it that the

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highest and the lowest forms of art have more in common with each other than either has with art in the middle. It was important, Kael argued by example, to have honest reactions to works of both high and popular culture. Using movies to address social problems, and praising them for their stands on particular issues, she felt was being false to what ought to be enjoyed in the movies. Of Stanley Kramer, the most successful middlebrow director of the 1950s and 1960s *(Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?, Judgment at Nuremberg, On the Beach)*, she dismissively wrote: "Stanley Kramer runs for office in the arts."

Robert Warshow, whose extraordinary film criticism of the early 1950s exerted a strong influence on Kael, once explained the intellectual, or critical, moviegoer's challenge as follows: "A man watches a movie, and the critic must acknowledge that he is that man." By vocation a literary highbrow—an editor at *Commentary*, a regular contributor to *Partisan Review*—Robert Warshow felt that popular art and culture repaid careful study. Honest critics of culture could look unashamedly to the low in art, to the delightfully clever song lyrics of their youth, to the old radio shows, and especially to the movies. Here America had produced a good deal that was distinctive (the western, the gangster movie, the iconoclastic cartoon) and, in fact, most Americans had grown up saturated by this popular culture. The point was to enjoy it, understand why it was enjoyable, and study it for what it had to teach about our country and ourselves.

In her early years at *The New Yorker*, Kael wrote impressively along these general lines. She tended to judge movies by their intentions. She did not ask that all movies pass Jamesian criteria for high art. Yet she struggled to maintain sensible and honest standards for a powerful, if still minor, art form, the movies, which she wrote about with great energy and affection. Many of the positions Pauline Kael took in the 1960s, particularly in her *Harper's* essay "Trash, Art and the Movies," are best understood as part of her effort to clear the ground so as to be able to appreciate movies for what they usually are, which is generally something very different from high art. Her advocacy of a trashy melodrama entitled *Wild in the Streets*, for example, was probably motivated less by her admiration for the movie than by her belief that a wacky B-movie about a teenage dictator had its own place in the scheme of things.

This almost dogmatically unpretentious mode of appraisal continued to be a hallmark of Pauline Kael's movie criticism through the early 1970s. She convinced by the cleverness of her polemics and the passion spent upon her enthusiasms. She was also, when writing in top form, very readable. That her taste in movies could be erratic, even eccentric, didn't seem crucial. Movie criticism is extraordinary in that it doesn't depend on the shared taste of critic and reader. We judge the value of a literary critic by the consistency of his judgments and their dependability, if not of their absolute infallibility. Should a powerful literary critic strongly praise a literary work that is, in fact, truly mediocre, his standing would suffer greatly with his readers. It doesn't quite make sense to judge movie critics by the same standard. All movies are first and last commercial ventures, whose chief purpose is to win an audience by giving that audience what it wants; only those movies with extravagant pretensions to being works of art require the serious criticism owed to art. Very few movies, now or at any other time, qualify for such criticism.

When a critic informs us that a movie is good, features excellent performances, has a fine musical score, we still know very little about that movie. The real subject of movie criticism is: What is a movie saying, why does it or doesn't it appeal to its audience at this time, and why is it or isn't it likely to be a commercial success? How well the movie is acted and executed are not beside the point, but the best movie criticism has always been more concerned with contemporary sociology than with aesthetics.

Pauline Kael was surpassingly good at this sociological kind of criticism. She went to the movies, described them, explained their themes and the sources of their appeal, and placed them in their commercial and cultural contexts. She never traveled with the pack; her judgments were altogether independent. She was, for example, the only critic to understand and be able to explain why *The Godfather* was a classic of Hollywood moviemaking when it was first released. Other critics and reviewers tended to attack it or to patronize it because it was based on a mass-market best-selling novel. After Kael declared it a splendid movie, Hollywood, it was said, could

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grant this already huge box-office hit an Oscar with a good conscience.

Nor did Kael go along with dominant political attitudes of her fellow critics. Her own politics are probably some variant of liberal left, yet a political movie tended to make her suspicious. Political movies tend to appeal to the snob, not to the honest moviegoer, and Kael was ever the defender of the honest moviegoer. The reputations of a number of high-prestige political movies (*Little Big Man*, with Dustin Hoffman, comes to mind) suffered because Kael dealt them a powerful critical drubbing.

Still, the possession of this kind of critical power—all the more impressive in not deriving from a regular job as reviewer for the *New York Times*—slowly began to have its effects on Pauline Kael's writing. When she attempted single-handedly to make Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* into a major cultural event, it was evident that she was playing around a bit, trying out her power, attempting a bit of king making. People may differ about the quality of *Last Tango in Paris*, but the critical inflation of Kael's review—comparing the movie to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and going quite bonkers about the high artistry of the interminable sex scenes between Marlon Brando and Maria Schneider—suggested that something had radically changed in Kael's conception of her own job.

Her advocacy of certain kinds of movies began to take on a troubling aspect—troubling at any rate to those of her admirers who thought that, in Pauline Kael, they had at last found a critic who put the movies in correct critical perspective. In particular, her penchant for violence in movies began to assume the nature of an obsession. When she lavished praise on the director Sam Peckinpah, whose films were top-heavy with violence, one assumed that she was doing so in part to make fun of those who complain that violence in the movies has a terrible effect on children and therefore ought to be, somehow, regulated. But soon it began to appear as if Kael herself had a real appetite for violence, at least on the screen, or so it seemed when she wrote appreciative pieces about such incarnadine directors as Brian de Palma, whose laboriously wrought movies always featured vast bloodshed. Kael admired violence for the "kinetic energy" it could add to a movie, but after a while she seemed simply to enjoy the sight of destruction, human and otherwise.

Little by little, Kael seemed to lapse into the very tendencies against which her early career was formed. Certain directors, in her view, could do no wrong. The most notorious instance was the director Robert Altman, who during the middle seventies, was her golden boy; everything Altman did, no matter how muddled or aesthetically displeasing, Kael seemed to find exhilarating. It began to appear as if he were her protégé, as if she had responsibility for his career. What Pauline Kael thought about all movies became of great moment. For a time it seemed as if she were no longer enjoying movies and conveying her enjoyment through her writing but was now handing out grades, determining who was to pass and go forth and who was to be held back. She was tireless in promoting her idiosyncratic doctrine of "kinetic energy," and equally tireless in her ever more fervid excoriations of gentility and sensibility in the movies.

Pauline Kael's good humor and high spirits made even her excursions into trashy movies pleasurable to read, though by the late 1970s her prose came to seem a bit mannered and grating. But when lesser people, such as Roger Ebert, began to follow her lead by taking trashy movies seriously, and did so without her buoyant humor and spirit, the effect was depressing in the extreme. Here, for example, is Hal Hinson, of the *Washington Post*, who is a Kaelian in the same sense that young men who studied under F. R. Leavis at Cambridge became known as Leavisites, on the rock-and-roll movie biography *La Bamba*:

> Basically, it's a load of corn—an up-from-the-basement account of a pop comet—but the movie has an energetic, almost naive spirit. It plays like a film about a neighborhood hero made by an adoring youngster down the street, and the hero worship is so unrestrained that it has a kind of infectious freshness that overwhelms any objections.

Any objections whatsoever? Hinson has the Kael style down to parodic perfection, including Kael's hyperbole. What he does not have—what none of her disciples has—is the critical authority Kael could bring to bear.

Following a brief and apparently unsuccessful hiatus, during which she attempted to

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produce movies on her own, Pauline Kael returned to the pages of *The New Yorker*. Interest in the movies has lessened, at least as a subject of heated discussion, since her glory days. Reading her today has become something akin to a parlor guessing game. Will she like the movie *Platoon* for its kinetic energy, or dislike it for its middlebrow political humanism? (As it turned out, she disliked it.) Will she approve her man de Palma's *The Untouchables*, or will she consider it a sellout to mainstream Hollywood commercial demands? (She approved it.) But, as with a parlor game, there does not seem to be much at stake.

Somewhere along the line, Pauline Kael has lost the authority she once possessed. She can no longer guarantee a lively discussion about a movie because she has chosen to disagree with the common consensus of critical opinion about it; nor, in praising a movie, no matter how extravagantly, can she assure it a large and interested audience. Some while ago—in 1982 in the *New York Review of Books*—Kael's prose was the subject of a lashing attack by Renata Adler. That prose, which once seemed so fresh and so cleansing of intellectual pretension, now seems rather a mass of clichés, even if they are clichés that Pauline Kael herself first put into circulation. As with many another original stylist, it hasn't taken long for the element of self-parody to seep in. Pauline Kael today reads all too much like Hal Hinson.

Perhaps Kael's critical experiment was doomed from the outset. It may well be impossible to blend a highbrow insistence on authentic artistic experiences with a love for lowbrow energy and come up with a coherent way in which to interpret movies. An intellectual perversity seems inherent in the procedure. Robert Warshow was correct to say that a serious critic of the movies has to acknowledge that lower forms of art have their own validity and that these can provide their own pleasures. But what lower forms of art cannot do is support sustained critical attention. Microscopic scrutiny kills the incidental delights of trashy movies; besides, these delights usually derive from those moments when such movies, almost by accident, get something right in a way that touches us deeply. Lowbrow art, in other words, works best when it accidentally manages, however briefly, to seem like high art. But it is never art in and of itself.

Pauline Kael once understood this perhaps better than anyone; her understanding of it was part of what made her attack on auteur and other movie criticism so impressive. But such crucial distinctions seem to have blurred in her mind. Like many a critic whose chief stock-in-trade is a no-nonsense approach to his or her subject, evidence of nonsense in Kael's own work seems near fatal. Nowadays when she praises a low-grade movie, she seems to believe it herself; that is, she seems to believe that it is something more than merely enjoyable trash.

This critical game of searching out art in trash, hoping to come upon a diamond in the dunghill, has been taken up in great boring earnestness by the younger generation of movie critics who have been much influenced by Pauline Kael. During an intellectually windy and pretentious time, Kael was immensely helpful in making plain that one could enjoy a third-rate movie without feeling one has been violated by the experience. But her disciples have taken this a long stride further and now eagerly argue that the third-rate really is first-rate. With more and more juvenile movies being produced, the low in cinematic art needs no defenders nowadays. Junky movies such as *Robocop* get very respectful treatment; the last American movie accorded classic status was *E.T.*

There are even signs that in Hollywood the determinedly lowbrow has become the establishment. Consider the recent film version of John Updike's novel *The Witches of Eastwick*. Once upon a time—and not so long ago as all that—such a novel would have been handled very gently indeed, turned over to a director known for his "refinement": a Jack Clayton, perhaps, or a Martin Ritt. Now, however, *The Witches of Eastwick* is given to a director named George Miller, who is best known for his series of violence fests known as the "Mad Max" movies. Miller is a director much beloved by Pauline Kael and her acolytes. Predictably, he turned Updike's novel about witchcraft and feminism into a special-effects orgy in which a notable moment shows an ensorcelled woman vomiting up thousands upon thousands of cherry pits. This lowbrow triumph not only did well at the box office but with the critics, so many of whom have come not to enjoy but to reverence such trash.

Pauline Kael's extraordinary career as a movie critic has not been without its ironies.

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She once entitled one of her collections of movie criticism *I Lost It at the Movies*, a title whose meaning seems to change with the years. The *It* must have originally stood for Miss Kael's heart; today it begins to seem as if the *It* she has lost is her fine critical balance and authority. What the rest of us have lost is a critic who once seemed indispensable.

Learning the Bicycle

(for Heather)

WYATT PRUNTY

The older children pedal past
Stable as little gyros, spinning hard
To supper, bath, and bed, until at last
We also quit, silent and tired
Beside the darkening yard where trees
Now shadow up instead of down.
Their predictable lengths can only tease
Her as, head lowered, she walks her bike alone
Somewhere between her wanting to ride
And her certainty she will always fall.

Tomorrow, though I will run behind,
Arms out to catch her, she'll tilt then balance wide
Of my reach, till distance makes her small,
Smaller, beyond the place I stop and know
That to teach her I had to follow
And when she learned I had to let her go.

WYATT PRUNTY teaches in the Writing Seminars of Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of *The Times Between*, *What Women Know*, *What Men Believe*, and, forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press, *Balance Is Belief*.

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Books

The Closing of the American Mind

An Intellectual Best-Seller Revisited

SIDNEY HOOK

THE CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN MIND: EDUCATION AND THE CRISIS OF REASON. *By Allan Bloom. Simon & Schuster. $18.95. Paper, $5.95.*

The phenomenal intellectual and commercial success of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* cannot be explained by the philosophical sophistication or political maturity of the American public. What it signifies is the widespread recognition that something is profoundly wrong with the American educational system. There is little agreement on what is wrong and why. But the dissatisfaction is periodically fed by government and foundation reports that are headlined in the press and become the subject of television programs. Despite increases in expenditures, the elementary schools seem unable to raise the level of functional literacy of those who complete their studies. Secondary education, especially in large metropolitan centers, is afflicted by increasing violence, drug addiction, and sexual promiscuity that contribute to a high dropout rate. Not only is there universal access to some form of higher—more accurately, tertiary—education but there is almost universal acceptance (except at Ivy League and a handful of other colleges), grade inflation, and declining standards, so that remedial courses in English and mathematics often make up a considerable portion of the curriculum for large numbers. It is unsafe to assume that those on whom degrees are bestowed possess the elements of what constituted a liberal arts education a generation or two ago. Whatever the specific reasons for the confusions and problems of the school system of the country—and the picture, granted, is certainly varied—every large section of the population has a grievance with some aspect of its operation.

Allan Bloom is convinced that he knows the reason for the failure of American education, particularly higher education—the headwaters of the system—whose products make their influence felt on all subordinate levels of instruction. He attributes the deficiencies and troubles of higher education to its failure to grasp the central philosophical truths about human nature, and a consequent failure to devise a proper, ordered curriculum of studies that would transmit the perennial truths, problems, and aspirations of (in a term he often uses) "the human soul."

Any realistic conception of social causation would find rather naive Bloom's assumption that the social evils impinging on the school systems can be profoundly modified by curricular change or reorganization. On the other hand, given that the schools by themselves can neither reconstruct nor revolutionize society, it still remains true that they can gradually have *some* influence in modifying the attitudes and behavior of their students. They can do this not so much by the information they impart as by the values of appropriate conduct they stress, and especially the habits of mind (or mindlessness) they teach their students. Although Bloom himself sometimes gives the impression that, as a seeker after the

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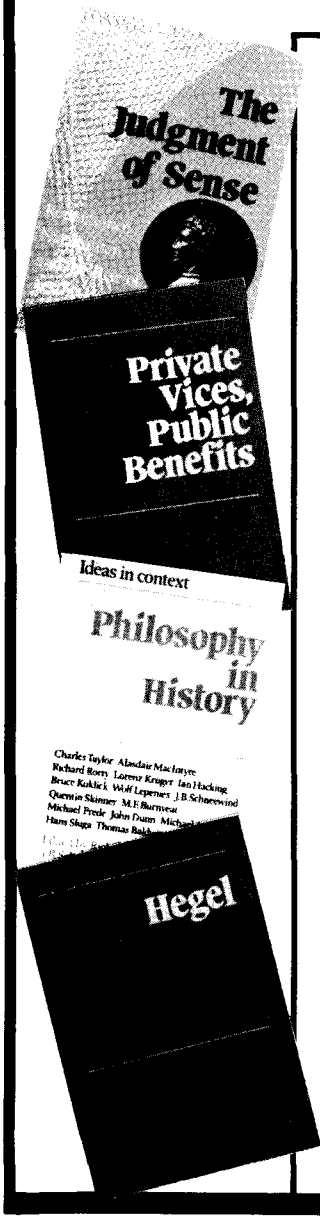

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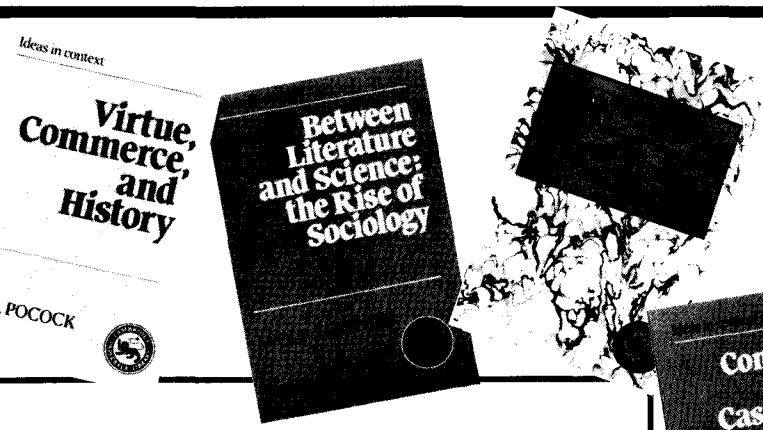

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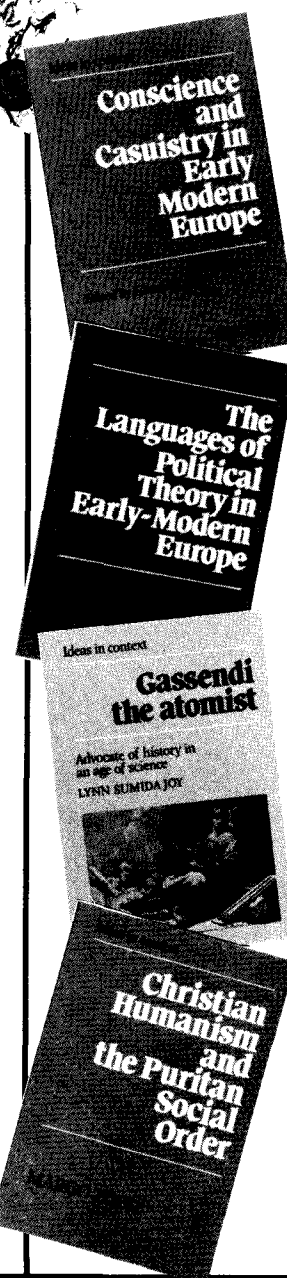

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truth, he is indifferent to whether he influences or affects anyone or anything, like all educators from Plato to the present he really is trying to improve society or at least prevent it from going to the dogs. He certainly cannot be faulted on this score.

Before assessing the validity of Bloom's analysis of the current educational scene and his proposals for improving it, I must credit him with two indisputable achievements. The first is to have evoked the astonishing spectacle of the intellectual bankruptcy of the so-called political and cultural Left in its response to the positions he has developed in his book. With the exception of two reviews (one by Richard Rorty in the *New Republic*, the other by Richard Gambino in *Freedom at Issue*, both scholars of independent mind), nowhere is the thesis of Bloom's book adequately stated and criticized in the large array of attacks made against it. Most of the attacks on *The Closing of the American Mind* and its author do not even reach the level of argument. Bloom has simply become the target of abuse, accused of subverting democracy. One extreme radical young fogy, David Reiff, taxes Bloom with being, if not responsible for Lt. Colonel North and the Iran-Contra scandals, a philosophical apologist for actions of this sort. And of all places in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which, before its now-evident politicization, was thought to be one of the most disinterested intellectual journals in the English-speaking world.

The second and greater distinction of Bloom's book is his sober, brilliant, and really quite devastating account of the barbarous attack on American universities in the sixties—an attack from whose consequences they are still suffering. Bloom is not the first to draw the parallel between the riotous American students in the sixties and the behavior of the Nazi-infected students in German universities after Hitler came to power. Those who are too young to remember or who have tried to forget will find Bloom's account of what occurred at Cornell—which mutatis mutandis is what occurred at Harvard, NYU, Buffalo, San Francisco State, Berkeley, and other institutions—so galvanizing that it will overcome their initial incredulity. They will also find it shocking that he does not hold the riotous students themselves solely or even primarily responsible for the collapse of academic freedom and integrity during this period, but the faculties—their teachers. Students, Bloom writes, "discovered that the pompous teachers who catechized them about academic freedom could, with a little shove, be made into dancing bears." Most of the time only the threat of a shove sufficed, as it did in Nazi Germany, where distinguished intellectuals surprised the world by their servility. In mitigation to some extent of the German professors' behavior is that resistance required heroic conduct, since it invoked immediate dismissal, imprisonment, and worse. The American professors risked only unpopularity.

Much can be forgiven Bloom because of the story he tells, as distinct from his proposed remedy, all the more so because the memory of those violent days and the lessons that can be drawn from them have been largely ignored. It is striking that of the hundreds of millions of dollars expended on research projects by the great liberal educational foundations, not a single study can be found of the stormy period that transformed so many American universities into political battlefields. Someone has suggested that in part this can be explained by the fact that a considerable number of the university administrators of that era subsequently moved into positions of influence in the foundations as officers and board members.

This denial of the truth about the rampaging students of the sixties is reflected even in the most respectable of the critical reviews Bloom has received. Among the most disappointing of the reviews from a philosophical source is Martha Nussbaum's in the *New York Review of Books* (November 5, 1987). Through a pedantic display of classical learning she seeks to discredit Bloom's scholarship—scholarship that is not relevant to his central position. Her account of Bloom's criticism of the riotous behavior of the students of the sixties is a travesty. She pictures Bloom as a resolute defender of the political and social status quo, opposed to the improvement of society presumably because he was critical of the student demands. She refers to his "bitter account of the student movement of the sixties, during which Bloom, lonely opponent of corruption, attempted to stop various changes he deemed pernicious, such as changing the curriculum requirements and even of faculty appoint-

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ment procedures in response to student demands. To this time of timidity and lowering of standards he traces today's rootlessness and narcissism."

So this is what the arson, firebombs, and violence was about—curricular disagreement. Extraordinary. The most charitable interpretation of anyone capable of writing this way about the demands and behavior of the rioting students of the sixties is that Professor Nussbaum is too young to have any memories of what occurred; or that for some odd reason she has not read the literature of and about the sixties; or she is fearful of the hostile judgment of those alumni of the sixties who, having escaped punishment at the hands of the cowardly faculties they intimidated, are now teaching in the universities. I don't know what explains Professor Nussbaum's case. She must have read Bloom's book with ideological blinders on if she failed to understand that the chief corruption Bloom was opposing was that of academic freedom. Despite my fundamental differences with Allan Bloom—and we are separated by an abyss—and despite the easy and frequent charges of his critics that his views would lead to the curtailment of academic freedom, I have much more confidence that my academic freedom is safer in an institution governed by him and his Straussian colleagues than in one governed by his critics.

Bloom indicts American students of the current generation for many things: a lack of understanding of the perennial ideals of Western civilization, an absence of coherent intellectual outlook on the world, an addiction to novelties in cultural life, a hypersensitivity to mind-numbing modern music, the pursuit of sex as a kind of organized sport, a glorification of freedom and an openness of mind whose consequences in fact close the student's mind to moral, metaphysical, and religious truths which constitute the true legacy of liberal civilization. It would not be unfair to ask him for empirical evidence of actual changes over the years in the basic beliefs of the American student body. Certain student practices, of course, are new and different—the vogue of new music, drugs, the flaunting of sexual promiscuity. But what seems to outrage Bloom most is what he calls the students' moral and historical relativism. Sometimes he calls it "cultural relativism," sometimes "relativity," sometimes the belief that "truth is relative." His opening sentence reads: "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative." Students, he writes, "are unified only in their relativism and in their allegiance to equality." Here we focus on his views about relativity and disregard the fact that he is talking about students in our elite universities and not the vast numbers still enrolled in religious and church-related institutions.

It may be hard to believe, but Bloom's whole discussion of the theme from the first page to the last is vitiated by a fundamental blunder. He confuses subjectivism with moral relativity. He seems to be unaware of the difference between saying (1) all truth is relative, meaning nothing is true or false, good or bad, but that our saying so or feeling so makes it so, and saying (2) all truth is relational, depending upon a complex of things that determine its validity or objectivity. To Bloom the opposite of relational is absolute, not subjective. The subjectivist judgment is arbitrary: it does not call for reasons or evidence to buttress its claims. It does not make a cognitive claim at all. It merely declares a state of feeling. A relational or relativistic judgment, on the other hand, can be challenged to justify itself. Bloom seems not to have heard of the notion of objective relativism. Sometimes what a proposition is relational to is simple: "Milk is a nourishing food," in relation to the digestive systems of organisms of type x. This is perfectly compatible with the truth "Milk is not a nourishing food" in relation to the digestive systems of organisms of type y. No subjectivism here, only more specification. Bloom would recognize the point at once if someone were to ask him: "How far is Chicago?"

Often what makes a statement true or false, good or bad is much more complex, especially moral statements, since for the problem in hand they are related not only to facts but to shared values in that situation. The complexity of our moral statements depends on certain historical conditions and on the plurality of values always involved in a genuine moral problem. "What shall we do?" may be a technical problem merely concerning the best or most effective means to achieve a given end. But when it is a *moral* question, it always

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presupposes a conflict of ends that must be resolved here and now. No important policy issue is merely a technical problem of means. Bloom assumes that there exists one underlying good that can be grasped if we understand "the nature of man," and from which all moral judgments of good or bad can be ultimately derived in all situations. He also holds that there are a number of self-evident natural rights sufficient to answer all our questions of right and wrong.

Not only is this position false, but demonstrably false. He does not realize that our moral economy is one in which good often conflicts with good, and right with right. No matter what the particular good or right may be which we seek to absolutize, it may be overridden in the light of the possible consequences of our actions on other goods or rights to which we are committed in the particular historical situation we find ourselves.

Let us examine one of Bloom's own illustrations:

> The students, of course, cannot defend their opinion. It is something with which they have been indoctrinated. The best they can do is point out all the opinion and cultures there are and have been. What right, they ask, do I or anyone else have to say one is better than the others? If I pose the routine questions designed to confute them and make them think, such as, "If you had been a British administrator in India, would you have let the natives under your governance burn the widow at the funeral of a man who had died," they either remain silent or reply that the British should never have been there in the first place. It is not that they know very much about other nations, or about their own. The purpose of their education is not to make them scholars but to provide them with a moral virtue-openness.

Well, the students Bloom taught at Chicago were very different apparently from those I taught at New York University. My students would have replied, "Of course the administrator should have tried to stamp out the barbarous practice . . . but not if the attempt was to result in communal riots and violence by fanatics resulting in widespread loss of life. The timing is important and it might be better to work through the Hindu religious authorities, not all of whom approved of the practice, even when it was really voluntary. As it is, it took the British almost fifty years before declaring the practice illegal." The students, in justifying their reply, probably would have brought up other historical instances in which an evil was tolerated for a time in order to avoid a greater evil. In passing, I doubt very much whether Bloom's students at Cornell, Toronto, or Chicago would have responded with the "openness" he reports if he had asked them about Hitler's racial laws, or the Holocaust.

The difference between Bloom and the objective relativists whose position he distorts is that, for him, good is good and right is right—and that's the end of it. To the objective relativist, however, morals are related to human weal and woe, to human and social needs, and to the feasible alternatives of action open to mankind at any historic time. But aren't there some practices that are intrinsically bad? Of course there are, as slavery is even when it has divine and religious institutional sanctions. But *intrinsic* does not mean *unrelated*—something utterly in itself. When the only alternative to enslaving prisoners of war was to slaughter them with their families, wouldn't Bloom have preferred the lesser evil of slavery, with its prospect of ultimate liberation? Would we not take it as a sign of some moral progress if a savage tribe were to enslave another defeated tribe, rather than to slaughter them, as was the custom?

Bloom, like his former colleague Harry Jaffa, glorifies Abraham Lincoln as a truly moral statesman inspired by the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. Hence it is surprising that Bloom does not recognize and appreciate Lincoln's pragmatic genius. Lincoln regarded slavery as a moral evil, yet he went to war not to abolish slavery but to save the Union. If the Union had not been preserved, there would have been no amendments to abolish slavery as an institution. It was the Thirteenth Amendment that outlawed slavery as an institution, not the Emancipation Proclamation, which emancipated slaves as a war measure. In the eyes of John Brown and other abolitionist fanatics, Lincoln would have been regarded as "a damned moral relativist," if the phrase had been in vogue in Bloom's sense. But Lincoln knew that prudence and a sense of timing were not only political virtues but moral ones. He feared the fanaticism of virtue, the idealisms focused only on one value or program pursued at *any* cost to other values violated by the means employed to achieve the ideal goal.

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The facts of history, Bloom insists, have really nothing to do with the moral quality of an action. True, they have not *everything* to do with the moral judgment, because many of the qualities of human experience are transcultural, but sometimes the historic context is highly relevant. Both Bloom and his students, for example, would certainly be appalled if today horse thieves were subject to capital punishment. But had they lived centuries ago in regions where stealing a man's horse threatened his very survival, such punishment would not have been deemed cruel and unusual.

The conception of cultural and ethical relativism in American thought, as Bloom interprets it, leads to the view that "anything goes." The true conception, however, leads instead to a better understanding of the causes and conditions of the values and practices different groups hold, and the likely consequences of alternative policies in dealing with the conflicts that arise from such differences in order to discover the more reasonable and better way of preserving our democratic society. Bloom rejects this approach as "liberalism without natural rights"—rights, that is, enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, ultimately derivable from God and Nature. He makes no attempt to show how they can be derived from these theological and metaphysical notions. And he seems unaccountably indifferent to the obvious fact that the rights to life, liberty, and happiness in the Declaration are not always compatible with each other, and that the rights enumerated in the Constitution are often in direct conflict with each other. The right to due process and a fair trial may be threatened by the exercise of free speech. This makes it incoherent to regard all of them as inalienable, indefeasible, or absolute. The compulsions of an ordered and orderly democratic society may make it necessary to override for a limited time any of the enumerated rights; hence none can be regarded as absolute. Only the use of intelligence or reason in making the decision can be deemed absolute.

To hold his view, Bloom is compelled to flagrantly distort history and to interpret the right to freedom of religion as belonging to the realm of knowledge rather than to practice. He must ignore also the fact that the practice is far from absolute, since a religion that practiced human sacrifice, or sacred prostitution, polygamy, or any other currently illegal action would not be tolerated under the constitutional right of freedom of religion. To cover up the glaring gaps in his argument—or rather the absence of argument—he charges that ethical relativism entails the lunatic doctrine that freedom, conceived as the right to do anything one pleases in the name of democracy, is absolute.

He taxes Oliver Wendell Holmes, as he does John Stuart Mill and John Dewey, with preparing the way to the present-day spurious openness he deplores. Holmes, he says, "renounced seeking for a principle to determine which speech is not tolerable in a democratic society and invoked instead an imprecise and practically meaningless standard, clear and present danger, which to all intents and purposes makes the preservation of public order the only common good."

The clear and present danger standard is imprecise because no one can foresee all the circumstances in which the consequences of speech, and even its modes, become problematic in a democracy. What is modifiably wrong with it is that some of Holmes's successors have made the declaration of what constitutes a clear and present danger—which is a *matter of fact* to be determined by a jury or Congress under certain safeguards—into a matter of law, as Judge Medina did. But Bloom's inference that to all intents and purposes the doctrine makes the preservation of public order under all circumstances an absolute desideratum is an arrant non sequitur. When it is properly invoked, it is best construed as an effort to preserve some of the other rights enumerated in the Constitution. The trouble with Holmes is that he was too optimistic and progressive, according to Bloom, and held that truth unaided by government "always triumphs in the market place of ideas. This optimism had not been shared by the Founders, who insisted that the principles of democratic government must be returned to and consulted, even though the consequences might be harsh for certain points of view—some merely tolerated and not respected, others forbidden outright. To their way of thinking, there should be no tolerance for the intolerant."

This is a strange reading both of Holmes and the Founding Fathers. What Bloom over-

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looks is that the Founders were intolerant only of the *actively* intolerant, otherwise they would not have tolerated Platonists, Catholics, fundamentalists of Protestant sects, Orthodox Jews, or philosophers like Bloom, whose theology (or constitutional theory in the case of Bloom) tolerated no heresy. Bloom is simply adapting to his own basic political theory the Augustinian dictum that error about first principles in theology has no rights. This is incompatible with the Jeffersonian legacy of the Founding Fathers developed by Holmes, Frankfurter, and Learned Hand. With respect to the most important issue that gave rise to the formulation of "the clear and present danger" doctrine, namely, the constitutional rights of members of the Communist party who are intolerant in both theory and practice, they held in effect that in a democratic polity communism may be tolerated as a heresy, but not as an active conspiracy. Communists (Leninists) are the true founders of twentieth-century totalitarian intolerance. In a democratic polity they can be tolerated as a heresy, but not as an *active* conspiracy.

Among the difficulties of Bloom's book is a certain lack of clarity in the use of his basic terms, chief among them "soul," "nature," and "reason." Is "soul," as Bloom uses it, a metaphor for the activity of an acculturated organism, or is he using it, in the Platonic and theological sense, as a substantial entity? When he speaks of "nature," is he speaking of the natural world, and of the human history or culture it supports, or of nature in some metaphysical sense, something over and above the quality and behavior patterns of things in their spatial and temporal dimensions? And when he speaks of "reason," is he speaking of a faculty or the capacity of intelligence? (In ordinary discourse when we say a person is intelligent, we mean, as a rule, that he or she is capable of giving adequate reasons or *grounds* for his or her judgments.)

The difficulty with Bloom's position is that, like Leo Strauss, he has not emancipated himself from the Greek notion that the cosmos is also an ethos, and that what is good and bad, right and wrong for man is essentially related to the cosmic order rather than to the reflective choices of men and women confronted by problems of what to do. Bloom speaks of "the rational quest for the good life according to nature." He tells us that "nature should be the standard by which we judge our own lives and the lives of people," but he does not tell us where we must go to find it. He certainly does not mean nature "red in tooth and claw" as a standard. Nor can the metaphysical or theological order be of any more help. We may hold that all men are biological brothers or brothers under the fatherhood of God. But this conviction does not clarify in the slightest why we believe it is wrong to act like Cain toward his brother Abel but right to act like Jonathan to David, who was not his brother. Nor does it follow from the theological doctrine that all men are equal in the sight of the Lord, that they are or should be equal in the sight of the Law, something well known both to the biblical Jews who petitioned the prophet Samuel to "appoint Thou a King over us," and to Charles I and the defenders of the divine right of kings.

Implicit in Bloom's analysis, and more explicit in the writings of his mentors, is his denial of the autonomy of the moral experience. Without reference to the existence of God or to some metaphysical "order of the whole of things," we cannot, according to him, intelligibly determine what is right or wrong or rationally defend a belief in human rights conceived in Jeffersonian fashion as reasonable rights, not literally as natural rights. Bloom offers not a single plausible argument to defend his position but, to reassert it, falls back on pages upon pages about Nietzsche and relativity. He is strikingly and strangely sympathetic to Nietzsche under the twofold delusion that Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead" left man not only bereft or in anguish but in terror without any compass to direct his life; and that the development of reason itself must lead to the rejection of reason.

All this is absurd. Hume long ago showed that there is no such thing as pure reason, that it always acts in the context of interest and passion. Thereafter a whole brigade of thinkers, including both Dewey and Freud (one of the few things they have in common) showed that the cultivation of reason or intelligence, by establishing new behavior or habit patterns, can modify and reorder the interests and passions to avoid self- and socially destructive consequences. Utopian fools believe that this can be done easily. It is just as foolish

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to believe that it is altogether impossible, that nothing can be done by intelligent nurture and education. Those who talk of "the bankruptcy of reason" or of science in virtue of the consequences of its development—which generates, of course, new problems and challenges—exhibit failure not only of nerve but of intelligence.

Let us finally return to the issue dividing Bloom from the pack of frenzied detractors of his book (among the latter, I note, are some of his ideological kinsmen, doubtless envious of his success)—that is, the issue of what the curriculum of a liberal arts college should be today. Bloom's approach rests upon the grasp and application of certain metaphysical truths about the nature of man and society. More comprehensive in its claim, and yet more detailed in its application, was the similar approach to higher education taken before him by Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins with an occasional assist from Alexander Meikeljohn as a justification of the curriculum of St. John's College. No protagonist of this approach has ever replied to my critical detailed evaluation of its program, an evaluation endorsed with respect to its scientific aspects by Richard Courant, Albert Einstein, and Bertrand Russell, and in whole by John Dewey. The book containing this critique, entitled *Education for Modern Man* (1946), presented an alternative required program for the first two years of a liberal arts and science college education for *all* students before vocational specialization. It should also be noted that in the best critical review of Bloom's book so far published, that by Richard Rorty (which is really more critical of Strauss than of Bloom), Rorty, too, on empirical not metaphysical grounds, advocates a prescribed curriculum for "the first two years" of college life. Such a curriculum allows some adaptation to local conditions, but it includes the best features of the St. John's College curriculum. In range and depth, it covers much more ground than the recently emasculated course in Western Culture at Stanford University. The proposals deriving from this empirical approach, following Dewey's lead, are oriented to three reference points: first, the nature and needs of the students; second, the nature and needs of the society of which students are a part; and third, the subject matters, studies of which most effectively enable students to develop themselves as persons and live with mutual benefit among other persons in their society. I predict that Bloom will not be unhappy with what he finds in college curricula devised along these lines without benefit of any controlling metaphysics or theology.

Although written from an explicitly Deweyan standpoint, some of Rorty's formulations, however, may be misconstrued. He is quite right in saying that *with respect to the arena of public life*, "for Deweyans, the theoretical questions, 'Did Socrates answer Thrasymachus?' and 'Can we answer Hitler?' get replaced by practical questions like 'How can we arrange things so that people like Thrasymachus and Hitler will not come to power?' " But this should not be extended to Dewey's conception of the range of curricular questions open to consideration in the universities. "Did Socrates answer Thrasymachus?" is a perfectly legitimate, indeed, inescapable, question to any intelligent reader of Plato's *Republic*, and the answer seems to me obviously no. There are better answers to Thrasymachus. To the question "Can we answer Hitler?" the answer is "Easily, even if he is not likely to accept the answer." As for the practical questions on how to prevent people like Thrasymachus and Hitler from coming to power, universities may *discuss* all the proposals but *officially advocate* none. It is not likely in their present politicalized state that their faculties are likely to have better ideas than the trade unions, churches, political parties, or any randomly selected group of literate citizens.

The specific details of any college curriculum are, of course, never fixed. They are affected by contingencies of national crises as well as by slow changes in the encompassing society of which the educational system is always a part. But it is possible to develop on empirical grounds, regardless of differences on first or last things, broad outlines for certain required areas of study appropriate for the liberal education of men and women in our time.

I attempted to do this in the mid-sixties when the tide of student activism swept away in most colleges the structure of required courses. It was in answer to the challenges of a fiery young rebel who concluded her tirade against the "class-angled and biased" re-

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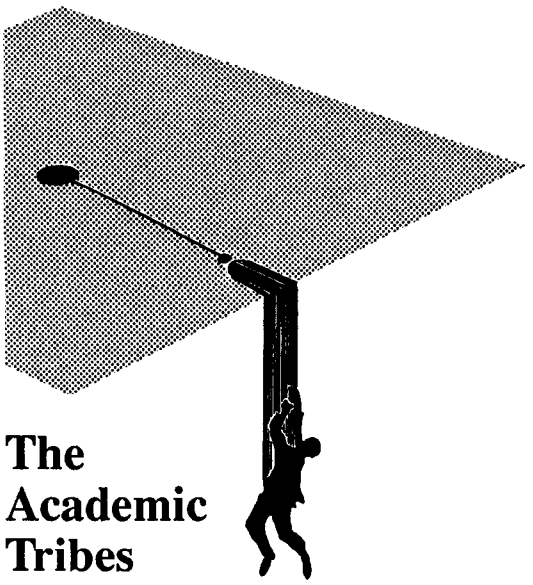

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quired curriculum of the college with the following:

> Who are you, or anyone else, to tell *me* what my educational needs are? I, and I alone, am the best judge of what I want and what I need. What goes for me, goes for everybody. That's democracy in education.

This was a perfectly fair question, although some of my colleagues resented the tone and manner in which it was asked. I still regard my reply to her as valid and sufficient to make it possible to justify a course of study which Allan Bloom can approve and which, if he doesn't, can, I believe, withstand any criticism he can make of it.

Here is an abbreviated account of my answer to what students, men and women, need to know, whether they know they need it or not.

1. Every student has an objective need to be able to communicate clearly and effectively with his fellows, to grasp with comprehension and accuracy the meaning of different types of discourse, and to express himself in a literate way.

2. Every student needs to have at least some rudimentary knowledge about his or her own body and mind, about the world of nature and its determining forces, about evolution and genetics, and allied matters that are central to a rational belief about the place of man in the universe. If they are to have any understanding of these things, they must possess more than the capacity to remember and parrot isolated facts. They must have some grasp of the principles that explain what they observe, some conception of the nature of scientific method. After all, the modern world is what it is in virtue of the influence of science and technology on nature and society. They cannot feel at home in the modern world ignorant of science.

3. Every student has a need to become intelligently aware of how his or her society functions, of the great historical, economic, and social forces shaping its future, of the alternatives of development still open to us, of the problems, predicaments, and programs they and their fellow citizens must face. Whether they want to revolutionize the world or save it from revolution, they must acquire a historical perspective, without which old evils may reappear under new faces and labels. Those who act as if they were born yesterday are the great simplifiers, who mistake their own audacity for objective readiness and often destroy the lives of others in the wreckage of their hopes.

4. Every student needs to be informed, not only of significant facts and theories about nature, society, and the human psyche, but also of the conflict of values and ideals in our time, of the great maps of life, the paths to salvation or damnation, under which human beings are enrolled. He or she must learn how to uncover the inescapable presence of values in every policy, how to relate them to their causes and consequences and costs in other values, and the difference between arbitrary and reasonable value judgments.

5. Every student needs to acquire some methodological sophistication that should sharpen his or her sense for evidence, relevance, and canons of validity. He or she should, at least in popular discourse and debate, be able to distinguish between disguised definitions and genuine empirical statements, between resolutions and generalizations, to nail the obvious statistical lie, and acquire an immunity to rhetorical claptrap. . . .

6. Finally, every student has a need to be inducted into the cultural legacies of his civilization, its art, literature, and music. His sensibilities should be developed and disciplined, because they provide not only an unfailing occasion of delight and enjoyment in the present but also a source of enrichment of experience in the future.

A few months ago I had an interesting conversation with a bright young man who was on the dean's list at a prestigious eastern university. He had read my autobiography and complained with some justification that it didn't tell him enough about my personal life. "Aside from your political interests," he

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asked, "as students what were you and your friends really concerned with?" I thought back to the mid-twenties and the students of my day; almost all of us came from lower-middle-class or working-class homes. "What made life exciting for us," I said, "were books, music—Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven—and love. What about your classmates?"

He hesitated for a moment and replied, "Well, I'm not speaking for myself, but I can safely say that the general run of my classmates are interested in sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. They say, after all, we live only once."

I heard myself reply, "You don't know what you're missing! Yes, you live only once, but these days you are likely to live an awfully long time, and you can't sustain yourself for long with sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. It will first degrade you, and then kill you. 'Today you live and tomorrow you die,' the wilder kids of my own generation used to say. If that were true, something could be said for it. But it is more often true that today you live and tomorrow you suffer, and for many long days after too."

I relate this exchange not to show my readiness to deliver a homily, but to indicate that I felt the students he was describing were missing something, that they were radically mistaken—and not unregenerate or degenerate—that somehow or other an obvious truth had eluded them. I believe I felt at that moment something of what Allan Bloom must have felt as he wrote *The Closing of the American Mind*: a profound sadness at the prospect of thousands of young men and women missing out on a good thing and accepting in its place something altogether inferior.

Although I reject Allan Bloom's analysis of what is wrong with higher education in our day, and therefore I reject as well his remedies, I nonetheless wish to pay tribute to his good will and intellectual effort, which has succeeded in arousing the country to the necessity, at long last, of a serious debate on what a serious education for modern men and women should be. His noble failure will do more to enrich and uphold the quality of higher education in the United States than the recent vaunted reforms of curricular offerings that in the name of an unlimited, and therefore educationally meaningless, diversity seek to politicalize our universities.

Biting the Bullitt

SO CLOSE TO GREATNESS: A BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM C. BULLITT. *By Will Brownell and Richard N. Billings. Macmillan. $24.95.*

Reviewed by PAUL ROAZEN

America is wasteful of its political talent. An underlying democratic myth about the omnicompetence of the average citizen feeds the illusion that an inexhaustible supply of capable actors can always be counted upon. A parliamentary system of government is less likely to discard its former leaders; our ex-presidents and their vice presidents, not to mention the unsuccessful candidates for those and lesser offices, are rarely able to survive in our political system. That devotion to the public service is a rarity among us is part of the general picture, since our culture resists the idea that political experience is anything special or worth cultivating.

In the case of William C. Bullitt, his failed career does seem like high political tragedy, and one that is peculiarly American. It is not stretching things too much to think of him as a version of Gatsby. As George F. Kennan wrote about Bullitt when he became our first ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1933, he was "handsome, urbane, full of charm and enthusiasm, a product of Philadelphia society and Yale but with considerable European residence and with a flamboyance of personality that is right out of F. Scott Fitzgerald—a man of the world. . . ." Although Bullitt's problems did in part stem from the context in which he functioned, certain character flaws dogged him throughout his life and ultimately caused him to be banished to the political wilderness. Yet he would never have been content with merely private gain; it was in the public world that he struggled, and lost.

Bullitt's credentials for historical significance are considerable. When Franklin D. Roosevelt was extending American diplomatic recognition to the Soviets, Bullitt, as American ambassador, chose as assistants men of the caliber of George F. Kennan and Charles E. Bohlen. Next Bullitt was ambassador to France from 1936 until the German

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invasion toppled the Third French Republic; Bullitt was really a roving ambassador all over Europe and had a unique set of diplomatic sources. (In the confusion of the retreat of the French army at the outset of the war, Bullitt, who refused to leave his post at the American embassy, became the temporary mayor of Paris.)

Earlier Bullitt had been an adviser to the American delegation at the Treaty of Versailles. He went on a special mission to see Lenin on behalf of the British and the Americans. Bullitt's exclamation "We have seen the future and it works!" usually gets attributed to his associate on that trip, Lincoln Steffens. On Bullitt's return from Russia, with peace terms that he thought momentous, the British disavowed his standing as a negotiator and President Wilson even refused to see him. Bullitt resigned and, along with other idealists, was bitterly disappointed by Wilson. Bullitt was subsequently called to testify before Senator Henry Cabot Lodge's committee, and he so thoroughly spilled the beans about Secretary of State Lansing's reservations in connection with what had been accomplished at Paris that Lansing was forced to resign. Bullitt's testimony helped Lodge defeat the League of Nations. It was not a peace treaty, Bullitt complained: "I can see at least eleven wars in it." Later on, as George Kennan has underscored, Bullitt was equally prescient in suspecting the wartime intentions of Joseph Stalin; had Roosevelt heeded Bullitt's 1943 written advice to strike deals before Germany surrendered, the post–World War II world might have been different.

In the literary realm, Bullitt had been a fine newspaperman before World War I, and then in 1925 he published a novel that sold some 150,000 copies; it was autobiographical and made fun of his old Philadelphia acquaintances. His second wife, Louise Bryant, was the widow of his acquaintance John Reed, author of *Ten Days That Shook the World*. In the late 1920s Bullitt began a collaborative study with Sigmund Freud on Woodrow Wilson, which did not finally appear as a book until shortly before Bullitt's death in 1967.

It still remains a curiosity how Freud and Bullitt came to write so polemical an assault on Wilson. At the time their *Thomas Woodrow Wilson: A Psychological Study* first appeared, the received opinion was to dissociate Freud from his part in the unfortunate book, even though it was known that he had his own special reasons for hating Wilson. Erik H. Erikson was the most prominent authority to question the authenticity of Freud's hand in a book that orthodox analysts preferred never to have seen the light. Not even Anna Freud, who had wanted to improve the manuscript with her own emendations, went as far as Erikson. In reprinting his original essay a decade later, however, Erikson took a different tack, and—without alerting readers to his changing ground—gave greater recognition to Freud's active participation in the text itself.

Part of the scholarly problem has stemmed from Bullitt's fascination with intrigue; Freud privately complained about Bullitt's secretiveness shortly after the manuscript was originally completed. Bullitt turned over his share of the royalties to his daughter Anne, and she in turn has been reported to be trying to write a book about her father. The result has been that valuable documents have remained inaccessible. There are half-a-dozen tantalizing references in the notes at the back of *So Close to Greatness* to an interview granted by Anne Bullitt to the authors, and one cannot help wondering how definitive a book might have been possible had they won her full cooperation. (Her name does not appear in the list of acknowledgements.)

It is not even entirely clear exactly what role Bullitt played in helping to get Freud out of Vienna after the Nazis moved into Austria. Bullitt was then temporarily back in the United States; the formal State Department cables make it sound as if FDR took a personal interest in Freud's safety, and it may have only been Bullitt's later bitterness toward FDR that led him to deny that the president had actually done anything on Freud's behalf. (When Bullitt did his about-faces, he could be untrustworthy; for example, he even tried to deny that he once favored the recognition of Soviet Russia.) An old associate of Bullitt's was the American consul in Vienna, and he was personally able to facilitate the rescue of the Freuds.

All the stories about Bullitt are colorful, but the most famous one is the account of the final wrecking of his career. Although by the beginning of the New Deal Bullitt had overcome the stigma of his disloyalty to Wilson, by the outbreak of World War II Roosevelt was disenchanted with him. Bullitt was impulsive and high-handed, mercurial and impression-

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able—altogether not an easy man to work with. It appears that, after the fall of France, Roosevelt was being devious with Bullitt by stringing him along about finding him another job. Brownell and Billings claim that FDR was also annoyed at Bullitt's treatment of "Missy" Le Hand, for years the president's private secretary. Bullitt (again divorced) was the one real romance of her life; they had an affair; and then Bullitt broke the engagement. But the ultimate falling-out between the president and Bullitt came over Sumner Welles.

Although Brownell and Billings do not go into why FDR disliked Secretary of State Cordell Hull (they do make plain FDR's disdain for career diplomats), FDR's admiration for Hull's undersecretary, Welles, was legendary. Hull hated Welles because of his special access to the president, and Bullitt craved Welles's job. Somehow it became known that, on a special train trip to Speaker Bankhead's funeral in 1940, Welles, while drunk, had propositioned a train porter. Bullitt, through friends who ran the railway, got documentation on the incident, including an affidavit from the porter, and spread the story. The FBI entered the case on the supposition that Welles was a possible security risk, subject to blackmail. FDR was not hypersensitive to the issue of homosexuality; and he tried to paper over the whole matter until Bullitt eventually forced his hand.

In 1943 Bullitt, whose favorite private secretary Brownell and Billings tell us was homosexual, circulated the Welles documents to a powerful Republican senator, who would then have demanded Welles's resignation if FDR had not accepted it beforehand. After having destroyed the career of Welles, who was a valuable public servant in wartime, Bullitt then went to FDR to get Welles's job. Alternatively, Bullitt wanted the president's support in a run for the mayoralty of Philadelphia. FDR's response to Bullitt became known, and Mrs. Roosevelt included it in her memoirs; but she left out the names, and the specifics of Welles's indiscretion. Drew Pearson, an old ally of Welles's, ran the story immediately after Bullitt's death: "If I were St. Peter and you and Sumner Welles should come before me seeking admission into the Gates of Heaven, do you know what I'd say? I would say: 'Bill Bullitt, you have defamed the name of a man who toiled for his fellowmen, and you can go to Hell.' " To FDR, Welles was a patriot, and his sins were those of the flesh.

Bullitt's attempt at electoral politics was humiliating; he was badly beaten for mayor of Philadelphia. His early disappointment with the Soviets led him to become one of the first of the cold warriors; he then wrote a scathing appraisal of Roosevelt's last days and his foreign policy; by 1946 he was persona non grata in Harry Truman's administration. In 1948 Bullitt became a Republican who hoped for office under Dewey.

For the rest of his life Bullitt remained friendly with the great and the mighty, although his high expectations meant subsequent disappointments, and he continued to have his fallings-out. He quarreled with Chiang Kai-shek (they had adjoining houses in Taiwan), and Bullitt, despite his support for the Free French during World War II, managed to insult de Gaulle. Ill health dogged Bullitt; a recurrent back problem and intermittent bouts with leukemia slowed down his last years. Always known for his tremendous energy, Bullitt traveled between his apartments in Paris and Washington, D.C., and a farm in Massachusetts. It was, his physician said, mainly out of "sheer boredom" that in 1965 Bullitt decided to release the manuscript on Woodrow Wilson.

Bullitt's obvious brilliance did not prevent his becoming known as intemperate and unstable. He was involved in some of the most momentous foreign policy decisions of the century and earned the admiration of such an expert as Herbert Feis; Bullitt could be charming and debonair, and despite his flaws he so appealed to Freud that Freud took him for years as a patient in personal analysis. Like some others in Freud's circle, such as the Princess Marie Bonaparte, Bullitt's pretense to aristocratic lineage was compromised by the existence of Jewish forebears. (His mother was a Horwitz; the family was Episcopalian, but the eighteenth-century maternal ancestry was Polish-Jewish.)

It is hard not to wonder what, in a different setting, the prodigy who was William C. Bullitt might have become. Churchill could have been killed in the 1920s when he crossed an American street looking the wrong way and therefore not had the chance to oppose nazism. Bullitt wrote some great speeches, and, to look at him in the best possible light, preferred to be a prophet rather than to play

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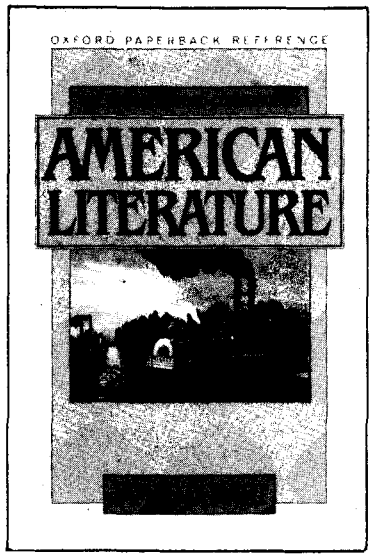

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the game. Having been an isolationist and an appeaser before Munich, he immediately thereafter became a belligerent advocate of American intervention. Despite all his capacities, he had serious weaknesses of judgment, especially about military matters, and he ended up an outsider, a political exile. Bullitt's character was such that he was unable to fulfill the part he expected to play. Bullitt's ambitions, although he failed to fulfill them, do not sound at all farfetched, and that is no small tribute to the scale of his achievement.

If a full-scale scholarly biography of Bullitt were ever to be undertaken, I suspect that, in addition to new information required, many of the contentions in *So Close to Greatness* would have to be brought into question. It seems to me bootless—since I learned such an immense amount from the book and have relied on it here—to go about developing the errors on fine points that I happened to come across. *So Close to Greatness* is lively and brief and not intended as a weighty enterprise; I think it is one of those biographies that succeeds in capturing the spirit of its subject. Even if Brownell and Billings have not written great history, I found that the book made for compelling reading. One of the most remarkable aspects of Bullitt's career, which may indicate our historical ingratitude toward public figures, is how the publication of *So Close to Greatness* seems to have gone almost unnoticed.

A Salesman's Old Line

TIMEBENDS: A LIFE. *By Arthur Miller. Grove Press. $24.95. Paper, $10.95.*

Reviewed by BRUCE BAWER

To read the personal accounts of the most celebrated American dramatists of a certain generation is to be troubled by profound questions about the nature of the playwrighting sensibility in our time. Tennessee Williams's memoirs provided a glimpse of a mind that seemed rarely to entertain a thought beyond the level of merest gossip; Lillian Hellman's *Scoundrel Time* proved to be permeated with (to borrow a phrase from a Williams play) "a powerful and obnoxious odor of mendacity." Now Arthur Miller has weighed in with his autobiography, *Timebends,* which proves to be a remarkable document in self-celebration and political self-justification, as discursive, repetitious, and intellectually simplistic as many of his plays. Miller is the hero of virtually every anecdote he tells—the defender of seriousness in American drama, the voice of integrity in the American polis, the man who kept not only his head but also his most deeply cherished principles when all those about him were losing theirs. Many literary critics, unsurprisingly, have cooperatively echoed this flattering self-appraisal, thereby demonstrating—as did those reviewers who praised Miss Hellman's memoirs—that the surest way to be applauded publicly for one's strength of character, in a hype-driven culture, is not to demonstrate such strength but to proclaim it tirelessly.

There are, to be sure, other things here: longish accounts of the writing and production of the play *Death of a Salesman* and the movie *The Misfits*; a smattering of worthwhile observations on the actor's art in general and on Lee Strasberg's Method in particular; and interesting glimpses of famous folk (for example, John Huston, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Miller's second wife, Marilyn Monroe). There are also some affecting personal touches, especially in the book's opening pages, wherein Miller discusses his New York childhood. But even here Miller's bent is dismayingly sociopolitical: he is preoccupied with such matters as the racism of his father (a Jewish immigrant and coat manufacturer), his grandfather's fascistic notions of government, and his own boyhood ambivalence toward the neighborhood cop. Miller even finds room in his first chapter to discourse upon 1920s municipal corruption and British imperialism, matters that can hardly have played a major role in his childhood (he was born in 1915).

Yet Miller skips over what was by far the most important event of his early years, the stock market crash of 1929. Though he lets us know that the crash had a devastating effect upon his father's business, his mother's morale, and his own way of life, he chooses to leave the crash itself out of his narrative and to

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✪ BRUCE BAWER is the author of a collection of essays entitled *Diminishing Fictions*, published by Graywolf Press.

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jump straight from his middle-class childhood to the production of his first successful professional play. In so doing he also passes over his period of employment as a clerk at a West Side warehouse in New York, his undergraduate years at the University of Michigan, his first attempts to write, and the beginnings of his playwrighting career (though in later chapters he does flash back to fill in some of these gaps and to remind us several times that he won two successive Avery Hopwood playwrighting awards at college). Miller chooses, in other words, to allow the crucial events of his early life to take place offstage.

Not only do these omissions break the narrative flow and destroy one's sense that one is observing the development of a young man's character, they also cause one to leapfrog over Miller's most radical period. For it was during the Depression that Miller became a Marxist—so "pure" a Marxist that "the very process of exchanging art for money was repulsive to me." In those days, of course, many people became Marxists; what a reader of *Timebends* wants to know is how this particular man became one: which events, persons, thought processes turned this fellow into a fellow traveler? In this crucial regard, Miller disappoints. Though he drops more than a few clues about the answers to these questions, he never draws a clear map of the route he followed from mother's apron strings to Marx. Rather than examine this chapter of his life directly and at thoughtful length, he chooses to view it in highly selective flashbacks, through the prism of his Cold War experiences. He prefers, in short, to play down Miller the thirties Marxist and supporter of Stalinist tyranny and to play up Miller the fifties victim of McCarthyism and champion of independent thought.

This is not to suggest that Miller makes a secret of his sometime Marxism, or of his continuing affection for Marxist ideals. On the contrary, his politics are very much at the center of this book, and his plays at the periphery. He makes it clear that to him drama is above all a form of social activism: "I could not imagine a theatre worth my time that did not want to change the world." Nor is Miller able to conceive of a life worth living that is not centered on an ideal ("without ideals there is no life"), or of an ideal, in turn, unbound to an ideology ("The much celebrated 'end of ideology,' which some influential ex-Marxists were elaborating [during the early postwar years], seemed to me to dissolve the very notion of human destiny"). Miller has, in fact, always viewed reality through the lens of ideology; and since, to him, the only truly noble twentieth-century ideology is socialism, the Soviet Union continued long after the Moscow show trials and the Nazi-Soviet pact to symbolize to him the hope of mankind.

America, meanwhile, stood in Miller's mind for "money-getting" and little else. The more money Americans made in the prosperous years after World War II, the more unhappy Miller (surveying the scene from his and Marilyn's Waldorf Towers suite) seems to have been about it. If during the war he saw Russia's salvation as a holy cause, he hardly considered America worth fighting for. (He believed, moreover, that his fellow Americans shared this sentiment, "but were too unsure to admit it, going along instead with the official pretensions to an overwhelming national purpose that would someday justify everything.") In Miller's view, America destroys you one way or the other: either it fails to deliver on its promise of success, as in the case of Willy Loman, or—even more tragically—it *does* deliver, whereupon one becomes a success-as-failure (full wallet, empty soul). The book's prime example of this condition is the playwright Clifford Odets, who, as Miller recalls in graphic detail, gave an angry speech about the evils of money at the Soviet-backed 1949 Waldorf Conference for World Peace; since Odets was by that time a very wealthy Hollywood scenarist, the speech was not without its ironies. Yet Miller does not read these ironies the way the rest of us might; he considers Odets not a successful hypocrite but a tragic victim of America's corruption, a "truth-teller" who had been "consumed" by America as surely as Willy Loman had.

During the fifteen or so years following World War II, Miller's career reached its zenith. It was then that he wrote his most celebrated plays—*All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953); it was then that he earned headlines by attending the Waldorf Conference, by appearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and by playing husband to Miss Monroe (1956–60). This period is at the emotional center of Miller's book. Like Norman Mailer (about whose books on Marilyn he has some strong opinions), Miller seems to want

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to be seen as an American hero of sorts, and he appears to think of those fifteen or so years after World War II as the time when he indeed became a hero. He characterizes his own participation in the Waldorf Conference as an act of "honor" at the same time that he decries America's postwar rejection of Stalin as "ignoble." While other former Marxists during that period were renouncing the unwise allegiances of their youth, Miller could see their actions only as a "disowning and falsifying [of] the American radical past, at least as I had known and felt it." Now as then, he seems unable to appreciate the enormous difference between the unfair acts committed in the name of democracy during the immediate postwar period in America and the unspeakable crimes committed in the name of socialist ideals during the same era in Russia.

The perversity of Miller's view is indicated by two McCarthy-era anecdotes to which he gives special emphasis. One is the story of his friend Louis Untermeyer's removal from the panel of the television quiz show "What's My Line?" on suspicion of leftist sympathies; the other anecdote concerns a studio executive's decision not to film a screenplay by Miller because of its implication that American unions are corrupt. The disparity in scale between such events as these and the devastating brutalities of the Stalin government that Miller then supported would seem to speak for itself. Yet Miller's purpose in relating these anecdotes is not to point up this disparity but to demonstrate that, in the fifties, America too was totalitarian. In much the same spirit, he comments that film-studio executive Jack Warner's anti-Communism would later "aid me in understanding some of the ferocity of ostracism in the Chinese Cultural Revolution." Where is Miller's sense of proportion? Of responsibility? He offers no rational geopolitical explanation for his politics of yore—only explanations based on personal emotion and "dreams" and such. "If under the pressures to go to the right I moved even further left for a time," he tells us, "it is explicable, if it is at all, as a willful act of self-abandonment and defiance of my new-won standing in the world. Respectable conformity was the killer of the dream; I was sick of being afraid, of life and of myself and of what on many days seemed the inexorable

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march of the cheerful totalitarian patriots [that is, American anti-Communists]."

Though Miller admits now that Stalin hardly deserved his reverence, he refuses to accept any blame for his prolonged refusal to recognize this fact. As Miller sees it, his intransigence—as well as that of all pro-Soviet Americans of his generation—was not his fault, really, but that of history, or of America, or of "Western society," which "continues to leave so many of its people spiritually alienated, so empty of the joys of life and culture that they long for a superior will to direct their lives." If he and other Marxists clung too long to their faith, he keeps suggesting, it was not out of foolishness or dishonesty but out of superior idealism. He even manages to twist Lillian Hellman's refusal to face the obvious truth about Stalin into a virtue: "Her loyalty to the Soviet idea was on some level much the same as her loyalty to a friend. Integrity meant staying with the ship, even if it was veering in an unscheduled direction that would bring disaster to all the passengers. Indeed, her loyalty was her most touching side." (Yet throughout the book he speaks insultingly of the loyalty of Americans to their own country.)

Elsewhere in *Timebends,* Miller argues that "people of principle, confronting evidence that their beliefs are mistaken, dig themselves further into their convictions to stand off the threat of despair. To lose hope is to become corrupt." When he speaks of his friend Lillian Hellman's unwillingness to believe during the late forties that the Soviet Union was raping its "sister socialist state" of Yugoslavia, the most Miller is willing to confess is that "there was enough self-delusion, if not dishonesty, in those years of the great historical crunch for everyone on every side to take his portion." (Translation: everyone is guilty, so no one is guilty.) Likewise, regarding the Waldorf Conference, the closest he can come to a confession of culpability is to say that "in retrospect neither side was wholly right, neither the apologists for the Soviets nor the outraged Red-haters; to put it simply, politics is choices, and not infrequently there really aren't any to make; the chessboard allows no space for a move." That Miller can, at this late date, suggest that there was no possibility of an intelligent moral choice between Truman's America and Stalin's Russia is despicable.

In more recent decades Miller has mostly ceased to identify his ideals with the Soviet Union. Rather than arrive at a new appreciation of America, however, he has preferred to find equally inappropriate idols to take Stalin's place. For instance, during his marriage to Marilyn Monroe, he spent a great deal of time interviewing members of a Brooklyn youth gang, one of whom, when asked why he participated in a gang war,

> simply shrugged . . . and gave me an opaque look edged with contempt for my powerlessness to penetrate his mind. They [the gang members] drew a certain perverse sense of dignity from the very purposelessness of their wars, a gallant kicking over of society's tables of loss and gain. The spirit's logic was the mind's irrationality. . . . [Theirs was] a government in miniature, but one based on respect, especially for their leaders, rather than on any material motive.

This is not the only time in *Timebends,* by the way, when Miller speaks of the mind as if it were some repulsive enemy of the spirit. Miller continues to sound, moreover, like a twenty-year-old millenarian: with regard to his presidency of PEN in the late sixties, he remarks that "the Un-American Activities Committee had provided me with the desire to make its like impossible here anymore, and maybe on some far-off day, everywhere else in the world." He tells us that when he saw a Moscow production of *Ten Days That Shook the World* his reaction was ebullient: "Surely we must share a common humanity!" The man never wises up.

Unsurprisingly, there are many contradictions in Miller's political thinking. If at times he chastises America for its inordinate "individualism," at other times he attacks its excessive "conformity"—conditions that would seem to be mutually exclusive. Unhappy as he claims to be with American conformity, furthermore, he cherishes the socialist ideal of "solidarity." (The word is ubiquitous in the book: "PEN seemed to promise an awakening of humanist solidarity at a time when the opposing creed of untrammeled individualism and private success was beginning its most recent sweep of the American political landscape.") Nor does Miller seem to notice any inconsistency between his pro-Soviet orthodoxy of the fifties and his advocacy, during the same period, of a most un-Soviet tolerance for diversity of opinion. Despite his affection

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for ideology, moreover, he tells us that during a recent visit to the Soviet Union he mentioned to Mikhail Gorbachev how wonderful it would be "if only it were possible to allow the facts of life to rule rather than to serve what each side wished to prove ideologically." Later he muses: "What ideology, I wondered, was not based on a principled denial of the facts?"

If I have not dealt at length here with Miller's plays, it is because Miller himself devotes remarkably little space to them. He seems to recognize the meagerness of his contribution to the American drama; sometimes he even seems to be apologizing for his skimpy oeuvre—or, more correctly, placing blame for it, as he does for just about everything else that has gone wrong with his life. "Had I been fortunate enough to live in a period when a high-level repertory or art theatre existed," he says, "I would certainly have written more plays than I had." To read the accounts he does offer of the writing and production of his plays is to recall vividly how simpleminded and didactic most of them are. The single most interesting thing he has to say about any of his plays is that *A Streetcar Named Desire* had a considerable influence on *Death of a Salesman*: "With *Streetcar*, Tennessee had printed a license to speak at full throat, and it helped strengthen me as I turned to Willy Loman, a salesman full of words." But for the most part, Miller has surprisingly little of interest to say about such matters as character development and dramatic pacing; to his mind a play is above all a form of political argumentation, and the majority of his plays, by his account, did not grow out of characters, situations, or voices, but out of hankerings to make bold public statements about American society. Apropos of *The Crucible*, which offered the Salem witch trials as a metaphor—a crude and inappropriate one, I think—for the McCarthy and HUAC hearings, he comments that "there were moments when an individual conscience was all that could keep the world from falling." When you're busy saving the world from falling, you don't bother discussing such mundane details as plotting and scenic structure.

To many readers, of course—including some literary critics—Arthur Miller's greatest distinction is that he was Marilyn Monroe's second most famous husband; accordingly,

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the part of *Timebends* that will interest these readers the most is that dealing with Marilyn, whom he depicts—often with unintentional hilarity—as yet another victim of the American system, "a poet on a streetcorner," "a Robespierre." Miller's habitually unrigorous employment of such words as *exploit*, *revolution*, and *totalitarian*, with the result that they lose all force and meaning, is nowhere more striking than in these pages. Perhaps his silliest passage of all is the one in which he remarks that Marilyn, like the aforementioned Brooklyn gang members, "had the resentment of a revolutionary. In her long fight with Fox [Twentieth Century-Fox, the film studio] for the freedom to make her own films, she positioned herself against the studio's exploitation of her popularity. . . . What she thirsted for was not so different from what the gang boys so ineffectually plotted and fought to win, a sense of self-respect in a world that called them zeros." Oh, the torments of stardom! To read these fatuous pages on Marilyn is to recognize *Timebends* for what it is: not the "intellectual autobiography" that Miller would doubtless have us believe it to be, but a typical celebrity memoir, characterized largely by an unconscious narcissism, a ludicrous pretension to humility, and a politics that has less to do with real-world considerations than with the author's desire for a benign self-image.

So it goes. Miller's one-act play *Clara* (1986) shows that in the late eighties he continues to look upon drama as a way of making a social statement and that his social ideas are as ridiculous as ever. The play concerns the supposed moral dilemma of an upper-middle-class liberal businessman named Albert Kroll, whose daughter, Clara, has just been killed "in her New York apartment-office," probably by one of the ex-cons whom she worked with in an attempt "to save them for useful lives." Kroll suspects that the murderer was one of these ex-cons, a man whom Clara was dating and who had been in prison for murdering a former girlfriend. Such is the nature of Miller's mind that he regards this situation as embodying a moral challenge to Kroll, who was once "courageous" and idealistic like his daughter—indeed, he is probably responsible for her devotion to the rehabilitation of ex-cons—but whose "ideal has flown" over the years. As Miller puts it in *Timebends*:

> In this bloodied room where his daughter died Kroll is confronted with that ideal again. Must he disown it, suffer guilt and remorse for having misled his child? Or, despite everything, confirm the validity of the ideal and his former trust in mankind, in effect keeping faith with the best in himself, accepting the tragedy of her sacrifice to what he once again sees was and is worth everything? The play ends on his affirmation; in her catastrophe he has rediscovered himself and glimpsed the tragic collapse of values that he finally cannot bring himself to renounce.

Just to make it perfectly clear that Kroll's "ideals" concern not only ex-cons but international politics, Miller adds that Kroll brings onto the stage "a slice of our historical experience over the past decades since World War II."

What is notable about this latest play, of course, is that the message of the plot would seem to be precisely the opposite of what Miller considers it to be. If *Clara*, that is to say, is meant as an object lesson in the relation of idealism to realpolitik, the inherent point of the material would seem to be that it is fatally dangerous to blind oneself to the actual motives and moral character of others, however much one would like to live in harmony with them. That Miller could get so simple a lesson backwards—a lesson which is, in fact, the lesson his entire life should have taught him by now—illustrates only that, after all these decades, he has still not lost his talent for missing the point.

A(thenian)CLU

THE TRIAL OF SOCRATES. *By I. F. Stone. Little, Brown. $18.95.*

Reviewed by CLIFFORD ORWIN

Socrates belongs to everyone, not just to professors, and I. F. Stone rightly insists that his fate raises questions that no democrat can afford to ignore. The problem with this book is that Stone has only contempt for Socrates' own understanding of those questions, even suggesting that his critique of Athenian de-

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mocracy was merely an expression of his snobbery as a *petit bourgeois* climber. If only Stone had been there, he could have set Socrates straight on everything; not having been there, he does so now. And Socrates, not being here now, never gets a word in edgewise. *The Trial of Socrates* is lively and readable and wide-ranging, but the reader grows tired in the end of listening to Stone lecture Socrates. True, he also lectures the Athenians for putting Socrates to death, but this seems almost an afterthought.

Ultimately Stone aims at the decanonization of Socrates. Sainthood is of course something that the two share, although those who pass for liberals these days are a lot more comfortable adoring Stone. His status as a paragon in academic circles in particular adds weight to his attack on a figure long revered as the patron and martyr of the life of the mind. But that was before the life of the mind came under such attack (even and precisely from liberal intellectuals) for its alleged "elitism." Stone's book is fashionable not least as an assault on elitism, as personified by a rather foolish Socrates.

Liberals used to regard Socrates as somehow one of their own, and the Athenians as thoroughly misguided in convicting him. Even writers like Karl Popper who found the thought of Plato deeply repugnant tended to exonerate Socrates of the alleged "totalitarianism" of his greatest student. If Plato's Socrates said much that offended, they were willing to blame that on Plato; Socrates they preserved as a beacon of the "open society." (This "historical Socrates" was supposedly on view in the allegedly earlier Platonic dialogues, including, above all, the *Apology of Socrates*, Plato's version of Socrates' defense of himself at his trial.) As for the Athenians, according to this view, they deserved only blame for the illiberalism of their democracy, for their failure to respect and protect free inquiry.

This view of Socrates found its popular literary expression in Maxwell Anderson's *Barefoot in Athens* (1951). In his preface to the play, Anderson admits that he finds the thought of Plato troubling and even repulsive, indeed anticipatory of Soviet communism, and that he has done his best to disentangle Socrates from the toils of his greatest (but unfaithful) disciple. In the play itself Socrates figures as a lovable codger who defends both democracy and Mill's *On Liberty* against all comers—including Stalinist Sparta. ("Lycon [an accuser of Socrates]: If you had to choose between Athens and the search for truth, to which of these would you give your allegiance? Socrates: They are one and the same, fortunately.")

Stone takes his stand in partial opposition to

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this tradition. He too suffers from the grave misconception that Athens and the search for truth were one and the same, fortunately. He knows better than that Socrates was a patriotic Athenian, however. In Stone's view Socrates, and not just Plato, was genuinely hostile both to democracy and to free inquiry. And this explains why he willfully refrained from offering in his defense the one argument that might have persuaded the jury: precisely the argument that free speech was central to democracy. Stone actually goes so far as to provide Socrates with the speech that he should have given, the *Apology of Socrates* as ghosted by the A(thenian)CLU.

The great virtue of Stone's account (and it is a great virtue) is that it takes the accusers of Socrates much more seriously than usual. In this it recalls Georges Sorel's far more powerful and intransigent *Le Procès de Socrate* (1885), from which Stone wittingly or not borrows his own title. (Stone, although up on what some professors have written lately, makes no reference to Sorel, and only a glancing one to Nietzsche's still more profound critique of Socrates on which Sorel's appears to depend.) Unlike Stone, Sorel offers a moving defense of Socrates' greatness; he anticipates, however, Stone's critique of the political consequences of his thought. According to Sorel, the Socratic preoccupation with absolutes was destructive of political life, for it not only slighted history and tradition, but deprived human freedom of its dignity. (One was free only to do the good; no genuine choice was possible and no deviation from the good tolerable.) Similarly baneful was Socrates' exaltation of the soul at the expense of the body, and so of theory (philosophy) at the expense of practice (citizenship). While the cracker-barrel optimism of Stone rustles emptily alongside Sorel's deep pessimism, much of his critique of Socrates reads like Sorel transposed to a cheerier key. Neither thinker is quite sure in the end whether to take Socrates for a dogmatist or a skeptic; each attacks the political effects of both of these opposing tendencies.

But if Stone's account takes Socrates' accusers more seriously than usual, it still does not take them seriously enough. For in the end Stone proves unwilling to entertain the possibility that democracy depends on certain opinions that it must defend at all costs—if need be by silencing those who subvert them. (On this crucial point, it must be noted, Socrates and his accusers were in agreement.) Stone wants to have it both ways, alleging that Socrates was an incorrigible (and effective) foe of democracy, responsible for corrupting its brightest youth, and denying that the Athenian democracy should have touched a hair (if any) on his head. He is altogether too complacent about the evidence of the arguments in favor of democracy.

Stone is simply wrong, moreover, when he foists upon ancient Athens a tradition of free speech in the modern liberal sense, to which Socrates could and should have effectively appealed. Athens was a democracy, in which every citizen had a right to speak in the assembly, but she was not liberal and had never recognized a right to question either democracy itself or the existence of the city's gods. It is therefore in deference to the views of his jury—not from contempt of them—that the Socrates of Plato's *Apology* neither asserts his right to teach impiety nor questions that to do so would corrupt the youth. Instead he denies that he does either. But—being the ironic Socrates—in the course of denying that he does either, he manages insidiously to do both, thereby re-enacting the very crimes for which he is on trial.

This brings us to the greatest difficulty with Stone's book, his treatment of the sources on which any account of Socrates must depend. There are three such: Aristophanes, Plato, and Xenophon, each of whom presents Socrates as a character in one or a series of dramatic works (a comedy in the case of Aristophanes, dialogues in the case of the other two). Stone pays little attention to Aristophanes and consistently mishandles Plato and Xenophon. That their dialogues are dramas, the speeches in which must be interpreted accordingly, is something to which he pays lip service (as do most scholars) but which he otherwise (again like most scholars) ignores. The result is an inattentiveness to context that ruins his interpretations from the outset.

For all of Stone's zeal to expose the man behind the mask, he never really penetrates Socrates' defenses. Socrates' mask is his irony, celebrated or notorious but noted by all of his great interpreters, from Aristophanes, Plato, and Xenophon to Rousseau, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Leo Strauss. Stone, unfortunately, has little understanding of this irony and even less sympathy with it. Confusing

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irony with sarcasm, he ascribes what he mistakes as Socrates' irony to nothing more than personal nastiness. Yet irony properly understood—a kind of dissembling whereby one presents oneself as something less than one is—is, when successful, invisible and therefore cannot smart. (A superior man does not offend but rather avoids offending us by dissembling his superiority.) And the irony of Socrates is successful more often than not, certainly with Stone, who again and again mistakes him for an idiot. Stone's Socrates wears his mind on his sleeve, and he needn't sport long ones. There is hardly anything so crazy or dumb that his saying it arouses Stone's suspicions about whether it is his last word on the subject. The spectacle of Stone's repeated failure to grasp that the joke is on him is comic until one wearies of it. Irony is a matter of context; one grasps the irony if one grasps the context. But the context forever eludes Stone, whose whirlwind tours of the Platonic dialogues never pause for such refinements.

Yet it is precisely Socrates' irony that points to the deepest differences between his understanding of the world and Stone's. For Stone, irony is superfluous (and therefore must be resented as malicious) because nothing need be dissembled; in particular, there is no truth that need be dissembled. Socrates, however, as all three sources present him to us, holds that the most serious and radical inquiries into what is good and bad for human beings are not to be paraded before the Athenian or indeed any public. For there is no society that can withstand the severest scrutiny, yet philosophy would not be philosophy if it refrained from the severest scrutiny. So Socrates does not refrain from it, but neither does he publish his reflections in *Socrates' Weekly*. Instead he conveys them obliquely, which is to say ironically, in such a way that it takes a great deal to get to the bottom of his arguments. (If there is a criticism of Socrates that Aristophanes, Plato, and Xenophon share, it is that even so he did not convey his teachings obliquely enough to avoid running afoul of the city.)

It was Socrates' irony, then, that was the truest expression of his "elitism," and it was, as Plato shows us again and again, his irony that most angered those of his interlocutors who detected it without being able to enter into it. For it confirmed their suspicion that he did not take them and their deepest concerns

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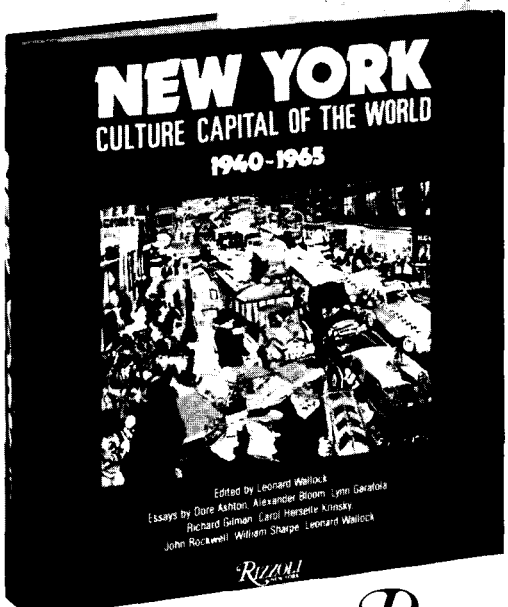

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quite seriously. Stone, unfortunately, rarely penetrates even the first level of Socrates' irony, his pretended acquiescence in the prejudices of his (usually well-born) companions. The result is that Socrates emerges from his pages as a mere compendium of these prejudices. It is astonishing that Stone has learned nothing from Nietzsche, the greatest modern critic of Socrates, who, stressing precisely his ironic treatment of his aristocratic interlocutors, presents him as plebeian to the core, the first great debunker and the first democratic philosopher.

None of which is to deny that the Platonic Socrates is a critic of Athenian society. In fact it is to suggest that he is an even more radical one than Stone recognizes. His irony expresses above all his conviction of the disproportion between the requirements of the life of the mind, on the one hand, and those of political life, on the other. No regime short of that of the philosopher kings can begin to address this disproportion, but these are not (as Stone thinks) a practical proposal but rather a paradox clarifying an insoluble problem. For according to the *Republic*, the last thing that true philosophers wish is to rule, and the last thing that any society wishes is to be ruled by them: the union of the two is a shotgun wedding for which no one could be found to hold the shotgun. It is here above all that the Socratic understanding of politics differs radically from the modern one, the classic expression of which is "Enlightenment." According to the modern view, the task of philosophy is to make society fully reasonable; there is in principle no tension between them. Philosophers then need not (indeed, they have no right to) condescend to society, and society need not (indeed, has no right to) resent and persecute philosophy.

Of this sanguine modern view Stone is an emphatic exponent. In his critique of Socrates he persistently confuses the issue of Enlightenment with that of democracy. One wonders whether he has reflected on Rousseau, the greatest modern democratic thinker and also the greatest modern admirer of Socrates—because the first great critic of Enlightenment. According to Rousseau, Socrates was no enemy but the greatest friend of Athenian democracy, and was so precisely through his practice of irony. By means of it he sought to shield popular virtue against the corruptions of the Sophists, those prototypical "Enlighteners" or popularizers of dangerous truths. Rousseau insisted that democracy, as the most demanding form of government, had more need of civic virtue than any other, and such virtue (and therefore democracy itself) could flourish only in small closed societies. (In today's jargon, Enlightenment subverted "community.") In the end, Rousseau argued, Athens failed as a democracy precisely because it was too receptive to what we benignly term "the life of the mind"—a life incompatible in a thousand ways with that of the citizen. What undoes Stone's book is that for all of his efforts he has failed to grasp the real issue between Socrates and himself, which is not that of the wisdom of democracy as opposed to other regimes, but that of the relation in which philosophy, the rarest and most exceptional human possibility, stands to all conceivable regimes.

But what then of Socrates' significance for liberal democracy, the only sincere attempt ever made at combining democracy with intellectual freedom? On balance, I do not think that to study Socrates should weaken our attachment to liberal democracy. For his reservations against democracy (in fact, against political life as such) are in the name of a way of life, his own, one of untrammeled inquiry, which among all modern regimes only liberal democracy begins to respect. And his political standard (which, owing to his relatively low expectations from politics, is as non-doctrinaire as can be) is a moderation which, among all modern regimes, only liberal democracy begins to approach. (The charge, which Stone endorses, that Socrates was the spiritual father of modern totalitarianism is the sheerest nonsense. All totalitarianism, whether of the left or right, exalts the class or national will as

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supreme and ruthlessly suppresses all such thought as it deems at odds with that will. It is thus much closer to the thought of his accusers than to that of Socrates.) The notion that the study of Socrates inclines students towards any kind of authoritarianism is, in my experience, simply false. Ineptly taught, yes, Plato and Socrates may emerge as authoritarian, but ineptly taught they rarely make much of an impression—certainly not on today's students, so smugly and radically egalitarian. Our danger today is less that Socrates will corrupt us than that our trendy corruptions will finally render him wholly inaccessible to us.

The virtue of Stone's book is that it reminds us that Socrates was someone with whom we liberal democrats cannot live entirely comfortably. Its vice is that it presents him as someone whom we need not take seriously—and with whom we can therefore live comfortably after all. In the present intellectual climate, this vice of the book outweighs its virtue.

City of Light, City of Sound

PARIS: THE MUSICAL KALEIDOSCOPE, 1870–1925. *By Elaine Brody. Braziller. $19.95.*

Reviewed by JOHN WAUCK

Although Henry James once anointed it "the mysterious home of art," France is not the home of history's great composers. While a new book on French musical culture is not on the same order as a coffee-table book I have seen entitled *Irish Art and Architecture,* it remains true that French musicians have been overshadowed not only by their German and Italian rivals but also by France's own painters and poets. Yet, at the turn of this century, besides being the site of traditional and thriving café, cabaret, and stage culture (familiar if only from the paintings of Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec), Paris was also the home of some of the more celebrated composers of the day: Bizet, Debussy, Ravel, Franck, Satie, Saint-Saëns, and even the expatriate Igor Stravinsky.

✪ JOHN WAUCK works as an editor and translator in New York.

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September 1988, 224 pp., $27.50

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This is the period portrayed in the thirteen essays in *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope, 1870–1925* by the late Elaine Brody. A prolific author and an authority on opera and the German *lied,* Brody was a music professor at New York University from 1970 until her death last year. Even though her book is divided into "chapters," the essays are quite independent. Not only does Brody's book argue no single case, but it contains a substantial amount of reportage without much critical comment. Three essays in particular seem to be largely undigested research material: catalogues from the grand exhibitions in Paris between 1867 and 1900; various manifestations of *L'Orientalisme* in the arts and in music; and synopses of material from *Le Guide musical* about performances of Russian music in fin de siècle Paris.

Brody is not concerned with presenting a sustained argument of a theoretical nature. The picture that eventually emerges from her essays is one of a musical culture, deeply influenced and in part ignited by Wagner's "music drama," that remained closely tied to the worlds of literature and drama, for the ascendancy of Paris at this time is, to a large extent, the story of program music in the late nineteenth century.

Wagner's appeal in France seems to have been more intellectual than musical, and the literati—most of them introduced to Wagner's music through the concerts of Charles Lamoureux—were among his staunchest champions. Wagner's aesthetic theories and ambitions embodied a romantic idealism to which the French sensibility seemed to respond quite independently of his music. In a lecture at Oxford, Stephane Mallarmé spoke of music and poetry as but two forms of "the Idea," and concluded, "Music joins Verse, starting with Wagner, to form poetry." Mallarmé's notion of the essential musicality of poetry is perhaps partly a consequence of Wagner's own obsessively syncretistic ideal—the *Gesamkunstwerk* (Combined-Art-Work). The soil for Mallarmé's view had been prepared by the romantic emphasis on the evocative, emotional power in poetry rather than strict representation, logic, and structure, an emphasis that found its echo in the surging, nostalgic, quasi-mystical operas of Wagner. Inspired by the example of Wagner's "music drama," not only French musicians but also poets and dancers (in *verse libre* or in Isadora Duncan's "free dance") of the fin de siècle aspired to the freedom and non-representational expressiveness of music.

It was the dramatic-poetic element in Wagner that offered the French access to serious symphonic music. Brody quotes approvingly the claim, made by André Suarès in 1923, that "by marrying symphony to drama, he [Wagner] gave music back to France." Because the traditional strength of the French musical sensibility has been song, in which music is subservient to the text, the French ear could only be caught by serious music if it had a literary hook. As Brody paraphrases the argument made by the critic Jean Chantavoine in a 1913 lecture, because of its "excessively speech-like and intellectual qualities . . . French music needs a text or an action in which it shows itself." Hence the natural affinity of the French for the program music that flourished in the nineteenth century, from Berlioz's imaginative story for the *Symphonie fantastique* to Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune,* inspired by Mallarmé's *Monologue d'un faune.*

The nineteenth century was a fecund century of musical criticism and theory, with Wagner providing much of the theory and receiving much of the criticism. Berlioz and Debussy were both excellent critics. In fact, despite his skill as a conductor and orchestrator, as a musician Berlioz played only the guitar and the flageolet, but this was not an obstacle to his composing. The game of playing both critic and creator is one at which the French seem to specialize (one thinks immediately of Cocteau or, more recently, Truffaut and Godard in the cinema). Of course, the distance between the critic and the artist shrinks the more one subscribes to Mallarmé's notion that music and poetry are forms of "the Idea," emanations of a genius that is neither specifically musical nor specifically poetic.

As serious music sailed out of the public consciousness into a post-Schönbergian realm where ideas might actually replace musical notes, the symphony and drama parted company again, and the programmatic leanings of French music lived on in more explicitly theatrical forms, to which Brody gives considerable attention. It would seem that in France it was difficult to find a musician without finding other artists around; music in its pure state is not a French specialty. Brody de-

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scribes at length the various cafés and music halls where artists congregated: the Moulin Rouge, the Chat Noir, and Le Divan Japonais, home of the famous "Yvette" (so named by Guy de Maupassant) Guilbert who dominated the stage from 1885 until well into the twentieth century. In Brody's essay about Russians in Paris, she describes the world of Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, in which Ida Rubinstein and Nijinsky mesmerized Paris from 1909 until Diaghilev died in Venice two decades later. The ballet provided a natural setting where musicians, poets, painters, and dancers might meet both socially and professionally, a famous example being *Parade*, in which Erik Satie collaborated with Cocteau and Picasso for the Ballets Russes—with program notes by Apollinaire. Many later ballets involved the collaboration of cubist painters and the group of musicians (all followers of Satie) known as "Les Six."

Brody's discussion of the artistic social scene is somewhat less satisfying, perhaps because she attempts to describe it from the perspective of the musicians, who—though certainly welcome—were clearly not the leading figures of the Parisian salons. While one follows Ravel to the home of Cipa Godebski, where he meets such luminaries as Gide, Cocteau, Valéry, Diaghilev, Arnold Bennett, and Stravinsky, one cannot help suspecting that one would get a better sense of the artistic terrain simply by sitting in the Godebski's home or tagging along with Cocteau for an evening. In the company of musicians, one gets a rather skewed and fragmentary view of artistic society.

In her attempt to portray the connections between music and painting, Brody avoids the conventional wisdom that makes Debussy's musical impressionism the natural link between those disciplines in late nineteenth-century France. Instead, she provides more dubious and circumstantial evidence: a "large number of artists painted pictures of women at the piano"; some French composers indulged in musical "illustrations" (accomplishing quite a bit of argumentation in one convenient figure of speech); one critic described Debussy's work as "shimmering iridescences, glimmerings, ripplings, and shudderings"—words, Brody asserts, more appropriate to describe a painting, though the question whether a painting shudders and

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ripples more than a melody seems debatable. Such argumentation gives the impression of scholarship in difficulties and does a disservice to the general persuasiveness of Brody's writing.

A broader social and historical perspective might have enhanced Brody's portrait of Paris, for to understand why Paris became a "musical kaleidoscope" in the relatively peaceful second half of the nineteenth century, it is important to know why Paris was a cultural capital of the world, through which all artistic ambitions seemed to pass. Brody devotes a chapter each to Russians, Spaniards, and Americans (notably the dancers Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and Josephine Baker) in Paris, but does not explain why all of these artists found France so hospitable. Nor is it clear, because Brody focuses so exclusively on Paris, why the Parisians (and the Russians in Paris) were so captivated by Spain, as is evident in such famous works as Bizet's *Carmen* and Ravel's *Boléro*. One assumes that Spain—close to home, yet foreign and wild in a way that Germany, England, and Italy could never be—offered a palatable introduction to the more genuinely exotic music and artistic sensibility of the Arab world. Through artists and their works, Brody documents innumerable instances of cross-cultural connections, but the deeper ramifications of mingling cultures are not drawn out.

Brody's one carefully developed look at art beyond the walls of Paris is her last essay, one about the Belgian group originally known as Les Vingt and later as the Libre Esthétique. Organized by the Belgian lawyer Octave Maus to promote avant-garde art, its annual exhibitions in Brussels between 1883 and 1914 featured a great deal of French art. A look at the program of the 1904 exhibition gives an idea of the group's prestige: paintings by Degas, Gauguin, Cézanne, Monet, Bonnard, Toulouse-Lautrec, Manet; concerts by Debussy, Ravel, de Séverac, Franck, Chausson; and a lecture on theater by André Gide.

Covering a period of more than fifty years, without a unifying theme or chronological structure, *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope, 1870–1925* cannot avoid some of the shortcomings one expects in any collection of diverse essays. Inevitably, certain ideas and information are repeated. The intended audience can at times be unclear. For example, in an essay toward the end of the volume, Brody explains that "playing the white notes on the piano, from D to D or E to E, without including any of the black notes" produces a mode that was used in medieval music, though the reader who needs this explanation would probably have found the rest of the book quite incomprehensible. Elsewhere, profound issues are handled in an almost offhand manner. In a discussion of Schubert's *Die Winterreise*, Brody pauses to observe that "music, with its ephemeral sonorities, intangible and elusive as they always appear, has the power to move men's souls—despite a lack of representational qualities. Its potency poses a question that many have tried to explain, but few have succeeded." A reader expecting an exploration of this question or a glimpse at those few successful explanations of music's potency would be disappointed, for the author is already off to the next topic: "Rainwater does not inspire German musicians."

Yet the book's variety succeeds in highlighting (with the help of a voluminous bibliography and contemporary drawings and photographs) not only the depth and range of Brody's enthusiasm for *ars gallica* but also the book's central paradox: intimately linked to the visual and literary arts, the Parisian musical scene seemed most truly French when it was most cosmopolitan and least purely musical.

Mr. B

GEORGE BALANCHINE: BALLET MASTER. *By Richard Buckle in collaboration with John Taras. Random House. $29.95.*

Reviewed by DEIRDRE MCMAHON

Richard Buckle is one of Britain's most distinguished dance critics. He edited the influential magazine *Ballet* from 1939 to 1952 and wrote regularly for *The Observer* and the London *Sunday Times* until 1975. He organized the legendary Diaghilev exhibition at the Edinburgh Festival in 1954. With his new biography of George Balanchine, Buckle com-

✪ DEIRDRE MCMAHON is dance critic of *The Spectator* and co-editor of *Dance Theatre Journal*.

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pletes a remarkable trilogy of dance biographies, beginning with *Nijinsky* in 1971 and followed by *Diaghilev* in 1979. Balanchine was Diaghilev's last choreographer, and Buckle's trilogy spans the history of twentieth-century ballet.

Buckle seems to have all the right credentials for writing Balanchine's biography. He has had a long and close friendship with Lincoln Kirstein, Balanchine's collaborator in the founding of the New York City Ballet. Kirstein is an ardent Anglophile, but unfortunately Balanchine's work has always received a chilly reception in Britain. The vexed question of "the British and Balanchine" is worthy of serious study, revealing as it does varying degrees of British chauvinism, stuffiness, and, in ballet, a barely disguised inferiority complex. Buckle was one of the few British critics to salute Balanchine's genius, and one has the impression that in this book he wants to make atonement for the abuse heaped on Balanchine in England. This abuse was apparent as late as 1979, during New York City Ballet's last visit to London in Balanchine's lifetime, when the hostility of a large section of the critical establishment brought the reputation of British dance criticism to an all-time low. When City Ballet returned to London in 1983, after Balanchine's death, the reviews were warmer, but of course Balanchine was then dead and thus "respectable."

There are particular hazards attached to writing a biography of Balanchine, who is quoted in the book as saying, apropos of a possible biography by Walter Terry: "My personal life is not very interesting. . . . If Terry want [*sic*] to bother writing about my work . . . then he can do this without my permission. . . . If Terry want [*sic*] to know about my inspiration or who is my Muse then he will never know that." Later he was to say about his private life, "It's in the programs." This is supremely true. Balanchine's life and inspiration are there in the ballets he created over six decades. No choreographer has ever been more revealing about himself. His life and work are so inextricably intertwined that a biographer ignores this at his, or her, peril. In 1986 the British dancer Moirer Shearer wrote her biography of Balanchine but was considerably hampered in that she had seen so little of the repertory. When she went to interview Lincoln Kirstein, she told him she was more interested in Balanchine the man. "Oh, I see, one of those gossipy books," replied Kirstein dismissively.

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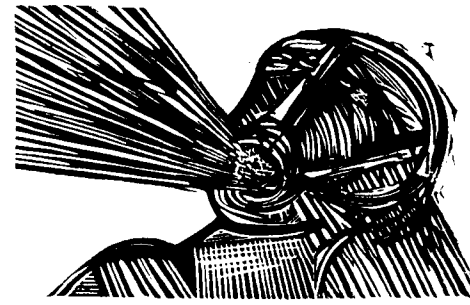

WOODCUT BY CECIL SKOTNES

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of books and articles about Balanchine. Those remarkable women in his life—Tamara Geva, Alexandra Danilova, Vera Zorina, Maria Tallchief, Tanaquil Le Clercq, and Suzanne Farrell—have given interviews or written their memoirs. Peter Martins and Merrill Ashley have written superbly about what it was like to dance for Balanchine. It is difficult for a biographer to sift through all of this material. But, to take one example, Buckle's account of Balanchine's relationship with Danilova is terse and rather dull. It assumes too readily that the reader is familiar with Danilova's memoirs. He approaches the controversial "Farrell Years" remarkably gingerly: "Silently and steadily she acquired knowledge and experience." This sentence gives the impression that Farrell was just a diligent swot, instead of a dancer whose extraordinary gifts and spiritual attitude to her art were so finely attuned to Balanchine. In fact, Buckle rather glosses over the importance of Balanchine's religion.

Buckle's book, written in collaboration with John Taras, who was ballet master at City Ballet for many years, strikes a distinctly uneasy balance between biographical information and descriptions of the ballets. On the positive side, Buckle has spoken to Balanchine's surviving brother in Russia. He has also been given access to correspondence with Kirstein and Betty Cage, the company manager. The analyses of the ballets vary considerably. So lackluster is the description of *Liebeslieder Walzer*, one of Balanchine's loveliest works, that it sounds like a tea party for retired nannies. That sparkling enthusiasm that is so much a feature of Buckle's style crackles out only fitfully, notably in his lyrical descriptions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the 1972 Stravinsky Festival, and *Divertimento No. 15*.

Buckle's effervescence has been considerably dimmed, and this is because the book has been carefully edited but in all the wrong ways. Buckle's spontaneity has been ruthlessly eliminated, but it is a pity the editor did not also curb his tendency, noticeable also in *Diaghilev*, to prolix documentation of a mostly trivial kind. He is particularly enamored of quoting screeds of telegrams. Nor has Buckle's habit of maddening non sequiturs abated. On page 214 we read that, after the astonishing 1957–58 season, which saw the creation of four masterworks in the space of twelve weeks, Balanchine actually wanted to start a small company from scratch with six ballets. Buckle gives us no clue as to the background of this extraordinary plan.

Balanchine, Stravinsky, and Kirstein. We've read the histories and by now the triptych has a beautiful symmetry about it—Igor and George, George and Lincoln. But it is a deceptive picture, and Buckle only vaguely hints at the tensions behind it. It is obvious that for the first decade or more of their partnership, Balanchine and Kirstein were often at odds about the direction American ballet should take. Kirstein had not even been sure in 1933 whether he wanted Balanchine or Léonide Massine to come to America. When Balanchine finally arrived, Kirstein was busily searching for American themes, westerns, minstrel shows, even *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for the new repertory so that it would seem more "Buckeye" and less Russian. It took a while for Balanchine to educate Kirstein, though he appeased him from time to time with works like *Bayou* (1952).

Buckle does not question the received wisdom about the relationship with Stravinsky either. Robert Craft told Buckle after Balanchine's death that Stravinsky "was really a father figure to George, who several times took the trouble to fly to California to see Stravinsky, sometimes to weep on his shoulder." As Robert Garis pointed out in *Ballet Review* (Fall 1982), the relationship was far more complex than that, as the history of the Stravinsky ballets has demonstrated. There was Balanchine's ambivalence towards works like *Jeu de Cartes* and *Danses concertantes* and his prunings of *Le Baiser de la Fée* and *Apollo*, the latter causing considerable uproar in 1979.

How did Balanchine's own ideas about his art change and develop over the years? Buckle gives us no coherent analysis, though there are interesting comments scattered throughout the book. When Balanchine first meets Kirstein in 1933, he makes disparaging remarks about Filippo Taglioni, Marius Petipa, Fokine, Massine, mime, and the uselessness of ever reviving ballets. In August 1952 we find him writing anxiously to Kirstein:

> If we continue in the same way we will become standardised, just like the others. We shouldn't do millions of little hors d'oeuvres. It is no longer

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progressive. . . . It must be a process of evolution. But if we create a purpose for the company and for the theatre, we can afford to fill in with little things now and then, but really have time to do something interesting. The new generation which would come to the performances will be the future citizens of the United States, some poets, some musicians. We have to do something for their souls and minds.

Balanchine never lost sight of this ideal. Two months later he wrote to Dwight Eisenhower, then a presidential candidate. Buckle rather oddly dismisses this letter as an anti-Communist outburst by Balanchine, but it is much more than that. True, Balanchine begins by expressing confidence that Eisenhower is the man to fight communism, but the major part of the letter is an eloquent plea for the recognition of the importance of the arts in American cultural life. "Arts and artists are never mentioned by our statesmen. . . . The materialistic part of life is the only one that is talked about. But there is another part which is the spiritual life of the nation, its culture." He was to make another such plea to Jacqueline Kennedy in 1961.

Balanchine made his audiences see as well as listen, and he resolutely refused to indulge in the star ethic and all that it entailed. His persistence paid off, and there is surely a lesson here, not just for American companies but for European ones as well. Without the cushion of public subsidy, it would have been tempting for Balanchine to follow the dictates of fashion and play box-office safe, choosing stars and star vehicles as American Ballet Theatre did in the bad old days. It is a trap that many Western companies, even those supported by public subsidy, have fallen into. In a city as star-conscious and as box-office conscious as New York, this was often interpreted as artistic suicide. In New York, Balanchine tilled a very barren and uncongenial ground at times, but City Ballet came through and preserved its artistic integrity. This is one of Balanchine's major legacies to American culture, but Buckle seems hardly aware of it. I think he is still too close to Balanchine's life and career to achieve true perspective. His biography is a tombstone rather than a monument.

Author's Queries

For the critical edition of *The Works of George Santayana*, the general editor would appreciate hearing from anyone with relevant first-hand material: letters, personal recollections, photographs, unpublished writings, etc., or information concerning such materials. All material received will be treated with greatest care and promptly returned.

HERMAN J. SAATKAMP, JR.
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For a catalogue raisonne of work by Stuart Davis (1892–1964) to be published in the fall of 1990 by Yale University Press, I would like to hear from owners of paintings, watercolors, and drawings with whom I have not been in contact. The catalogue will be published simultaneously with the Stuart Davis retrospective exhibition to be held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1990.

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The Reader Replies

The Vexations of Modernism

The news that Edmund Wilson was not an "unqualified supporter" of the writers he deals with in *Axel's Castle* has hardly been waiting these fifty-odd years for James Tuttleton (in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Spring 1988) to discover it in Wilson's diaries and journals. Wilson himself made his reservations quite plain in the concluding section of *Axel's Castle*, where he declares that "the time is at hand when these writers, who have largely dominated the literary world of the decade 1920–30, though we shall continue to admire them as masters, will no longer serve us as guides." But this is not to suggest that Professor Tuttleton's belated discovery is otherwise an accurate portrayal of Wilson's positions and value.

To begin with, the notion that Wilson had a love for "the classical values of reason, order, balance, and lucidity" surely misrepresents Wilson's insistence that the Greek classics were the products of fierce passion, irrationality, and disorder, a point he made repeatedly against the conservative position of Paul Elmer More. Indeed, an upholder of conservative social values such as Professor Tuttleton should remember that it was such conservatives as More and E. E. Stoll who denounced Joyce and much of Eliot, and Wilson who defended them. Wilson did find their work fit company for the classics, which More and other conservatives did not, and was hardly "obliged" against his will to declare their value. The virtues Tuttleton quotes Wilson admiring in Virgil—rigorous artistic conscience, careful fitting of manner to matter, and lifelong devotion to craft—Wilson also recognized in the Modernists. These are what made them models.

Wilson's position on these writers cannot be well accounted for in the black and white terms of Professor Tuttleton's essay. He declares Wilson to be an atheist and a Communist, and thus incapable of responding to the spirit of Yeats, Proust, Joyce, and the others. Yet, to take a later example, Wilson responded with appreciation to the Christian spirit that pervades Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, comparing the beauty of the final poems on Christ to the beauty of Dante. He also found that *Doctor Zhivago* exemplified "Yeats's constant insistence on the importance in literature of 'the crooked way of life,'" which Wilson's work too exemplifies. Rather than rejecting the methods of Joyce and Proust, Wilson in 1953 stated that he had taken them as models for his own fiction, and only regretted that he had not been able to achieve in fiction what they had achieved. There can be no doubt, though, that in *Axel's Castle* Wilson did produce, not the student's guide which Professor Tuttleton apparently would prefer, but a response to Modernism which is itself a work of literature.

Far from being the atheistic endorser of communism Tuttleton portrays, Wilson throughout his career was interested in diverse spiritual traditions, whether Hopi or voodoo or Christian, which he saw threatened with extinction by the materialism and crushing bureaucracy of both Communist Russia and capitalist America. This position is not at odds with the position of any of the writers studied in *Axel's Castle*, though it may be at odds with Professor Tuttleton's political outlook. That Wilson himself could not believe in any of these religions, but had to face the world without them while feeling the needs that they answer, hardly disqualifies him from contributing something of permanent value to the literature of the twentieth century or even from contributing more to our understanding of Modernism than Professor Tuttleton's take-over bid wishes to acknowledge.

PAUL JOHNSTON
Plattsburgh, New York

JAMES TUTTLETON replies: Readers will not recognize, in Paul Johnston's caricature of my essay "The Vexations of Modernism: Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle*," the account I offered of Wilson's troubled relationship to the Modernist masters. At no point in the essay did I declare that Wilson was "an atheist and a Communist, and thus incapable of responding to the spirit of Yeats, Proust, Joyce, and the others." What I *did* say is that—as the writing of *Axel* dragged on—Wilson increasingly rejected the aestheticism and irrationalism of the Modernists and embraced Marxism, supporting the Communist

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party ticket in 1932 and calling for a new literature of radical social propaganda. Nothing that Johnston says negates the proofs I offered of these facts, which were amply illustrated from Wilson's published writings.

Since Johnston concedes every point of mine in the act of denying it, I suspect that his real complaint is with what he calls "Professor Tuttleton's political outlook." My political outlook was not the subject of the essay—Wilson's was. But since Johnston has indicted me as "an upholder of conservative social values," I will confess here to my belief in the principles of liberal democracy. Wilson, who egregiously misread the political and economic situation in his youth, threw his support to the enemies of liberal democracy. In view of the catastrophic political and economic history of Communist countries in this century, I am glad that Wilson and his radical Marxist friends did not get their way. Wilson's later withdrawal from proletarian literary politics and his celebration of Pasternak suggest that he was too.

Perverse and Inspired Genius

I was disturbed in reading the discussion of Coleridge by Emerson R. Marks ("Perverse and Inspired Genius," Spring 1988). Is it possible that an expert on the works of Coleridge has so little knowledge of the man's life? Marks comments on Coleridge's perverseness, "sloth," and "dissolute habits," but ignores two of the central facts of Coleridge's existence. The first is that for perhaps forty years Coleridge was an opium addict. The second is that for even longer he suffered terribly from a variety of physical ailments.

To quote M. Lefebure from her biography *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium*: "Opium cannot be dismissed as a tragic habit which is but briefly mentioned as one of the darker passages in Coleridge's life and then put aside as irrelevant to Coleridge the poet-philosopher, Coleridge the thinker, Coleridge the Christian, Coleridge the plagiarist." The addiction becomes the central point from which all other areas must be viewed.

Marks writes of Coleridge: "His dissolute habits sorely taxed the patience of his brother-in-law Robert Southey and for a time cost him the prized friendship of William and Dorothy Wordsworth." This is a bit slanted. Southey was judgmental and insensitive to his friend's plight, speaking of Coleridge's "most culpable habits of sloth and self-indulgence," and saying that "he is at this moment as capable of exertion as I am." Southey can perhaps be forgiven his ignorance about addictions, but for Marks to write of Coleridge's "temperamental sloth little short of pathological" seems irresponsible. Even with the twentieth-century's remarkable advances in the understanding and treatment of alcoholism and drug addiction, "cures" are by no means certain, even with the best care. For years, Coleridge had no care, only the self-righteous condemnation of Southey and others.

Also, Coleridge did not "lose" the friendship of the Wordsworths—he chose to break off contact with them after being told what William had said about him and his "habits."

Marks writes, "Champion of duty and moral rectitude, he early abandoned wife and children and repeatedly lied to friends, publishers, and readers alike." Yes, Coleridge was a moral man, and that made his torment all the greater as he saw himself lie to, deceive, and hurt those around him. That is what happens in addictions.

Dr. Gillman was a physician who lived with Coleridge for eighteen years. Gillman says, "Neither morally nor physically was he understood. He did all that in his state duty could exact." And again: "Coleridge was never an idle man"; he worked laboriously "when his health permitted." For forty years Coleridge suffered from disease and addiction, each exacerbating the other.

To accuse a man of sloth, whose collected notebooks, letters, poetry, and prose fill numerous volumes, who is a giant in English letters, and who suffered beyond what we can imagine, seems harsh. An article from 1895, quoted by Lefebure, gives a different view: "The account given of the post-mortem examination . . . suffices to prove that this intellectual giant must have suffered more than the world was aware of . . . . It can only add to the marvel with which his achievements are justly regarded, that one so physically disabled should have made such extraordinary and profound contributions to Philosophy and Literature."

Of course, the continual complaint is that Coleridge didn't do more, that he never fulfilled his "potential." On this point, I let Coleridge speak: "By what I have affected, am I to be judged by my fellow-men; what I could have done, is a question for my own conscience."

PETER LANGMAN
Worcester, Massachusetts

EMERSON R. MARKS replies: Mr. Langman thinks me ignorant of Coleridge's life for declaring that he was almost pathologically slothful; that his dissolute habits taxed Southey's patience and interrupted his friendship with the Wordsworths; and that he abandoned his family and lied to friends, publishers, and readers (I might have added relatives). However unpalatable to those of us who esteem Coleridge as a hero of the intellect, every

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one of these statements is true. They can be verified from the biographies of which I am suspected of having "so little knowledge" and are irrefutably documented in those very volumes of notebooks, letters, etc., which Mr. Langman invokes in disproof of Coleridge's indolence.

If Mr. Langman was better instructed in literary history he would know that indolence and intellectual productivity have more than once coexisted in literary giants. One such was Samuel Johnson, who hated to write and, despite repeated New Year resolutions accompanied by agonized prayers for divine help in combating the sin of sloth, could hardly force himself to rise before noon.

Mr. Langman protests especially that my allusion to the poet's near-pathological sloth "seems irresponsible." If it is, I share the failing in good company. One eminent biographer writes of his virtual *paralysis* before the "trifling task" of penning an introduction to a deceased benefactor's literary works. Another, deploring Coleridge's inability to break the "perpetually recurring cycle of procrastination, remorse, despair, and more plans," concludes that his indolence, if sometimes overstressed, "paralyzed his power to organize and finish."

But better than easy further citation of modern scholarly findings is the primary evidence of the poet's own correspondence, sprinkled with references self-defensive and concessive to an abnormal debility of common resolve. Take a few from the years 1795–96. He writes to Southey: "My Indolence you assigned . . . as the Reason for quitting Pantisocracy"; to Thomas Poole: "Do not attribute it to Indolence that I have not written you"; to the same a few months later: "I deferred my letter à la mode the procrastinator." To John Thelwall he describes his face as expressive of "great sloth" and his whole person as "indicating indolence capable of energies." Another letter to Southey represents him as one who had frankly admitted "that all his valuable qualities were 'sloth-jaundiced.'"

If Mr. Langman thinks this defect negligible, Coleridge himself did not. No one should be misled by the airy tone of his confession, preserved in the *Table Talk,* that he had in himself "a smack" of Hamlet, whose tragic fate Coleridge founded in his "continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve." Behind it lay the private anguish recorded in a Notebook entry: "O me! my very heart dies!—this *year* has been one painful dream / I have done nothing! O for God's sake, let me whip and spur, so that Christmas may not pass without some thing having been done."

If I rightly follow his argument, Mr. Langman ascribes my irresponsibility to ignoring Coleridge's opium addiction and poor health. The relevance of the latter fact escapes me. Many writers have been valetudinarians without sharing Coleridge's temperamental peculiarities. Pope, though not above peccadilloes prompted by vanity or spite, was notably faithful to his word and indefatigable in composition. Yet with little poetic license he could write of "this long disease my life," having from his earliest years passed hardly a day without pain or physical discomfort. As to Coleridge's enslavement to laudanum, few will deny it some indeterminable part in his failure to realize his hopes and his friends' expectations. That it frequently led him to violate the dearest maxims of his own exacting moral code we know from the tortured revelations in the Notebooks. What Mr. Langman blandly overlooks is that every one of the deficiencies I alluded to in my piece *antedates the addiction.* The very dissoluteness that occasioned the breach with the Wordsworths had its ostensibly innocuous beginnings during Coleridge's student days at Cambridge.

Mr. Langman's recourse to Molly Lefebure's book to set me straight on this issue could scarcely be more unfortunate. I am ill-equipped to judge how well her six years as private secretary to a pathologist qualifies her to diagnose the case of a patient dead for a century and a half. But a mere sampling of her more egregious pronouncements should suffice to question even her store of common sense. (I supply page references so that skeptical readers may check their contexts.) On page 355 we're told that by April 4, 1802, Coleridge "was no longer capable of either the concentration or the lift of imagination required for poetry. Morphine had doused the sap of his poet's centre." Yet on or about that very date he began *Dejection: An Ode,* published the following October after masterly revision of the first draft, and to this day admired as a gem in its genre. On page 370 Lefebure laments the poet's refusal to admit that "he had eroded his powers of intellect *beyond repair*" (my italics). If so, his composition a dozen odd years later of *Biographia Literaria,* in which several chapters comprise perhaps the most brilliant treatise on poetic theory ever written, is nothing short of miraculous. But then maybe not—because on pages 488–89 Lefebure finds Coleridge in later life "much restored in mental . . . condition" and can speak of the "subtlety of intellect," in 1811, of the man whose drug-ruined mentality she declared to have been already irreparable eight years earlier! Apparently, in her simplistic zeal "to present Samuel Taylor Coleridge as it seems he really was—a junkie," Lefebure was troubled no more by consistency than by biographical data.

Given the fine quality of much recent commentary on Coleridge as artist and thinker, I can only wonder why Mr. Langman chose, as his ally in controversy, so flimsy an example.

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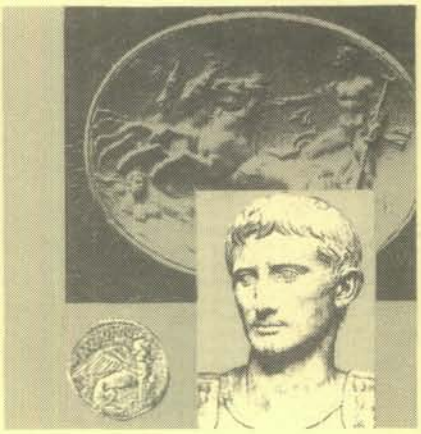

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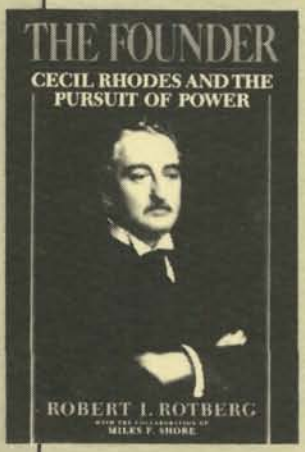

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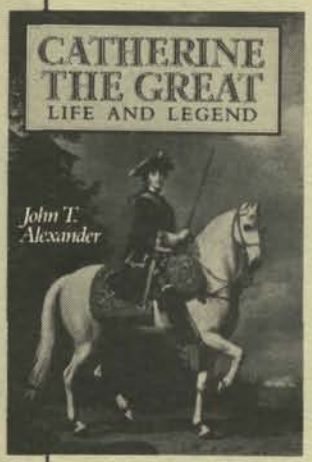

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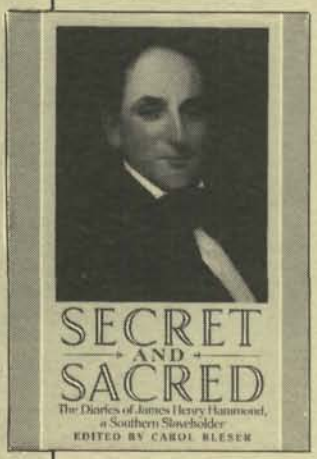

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